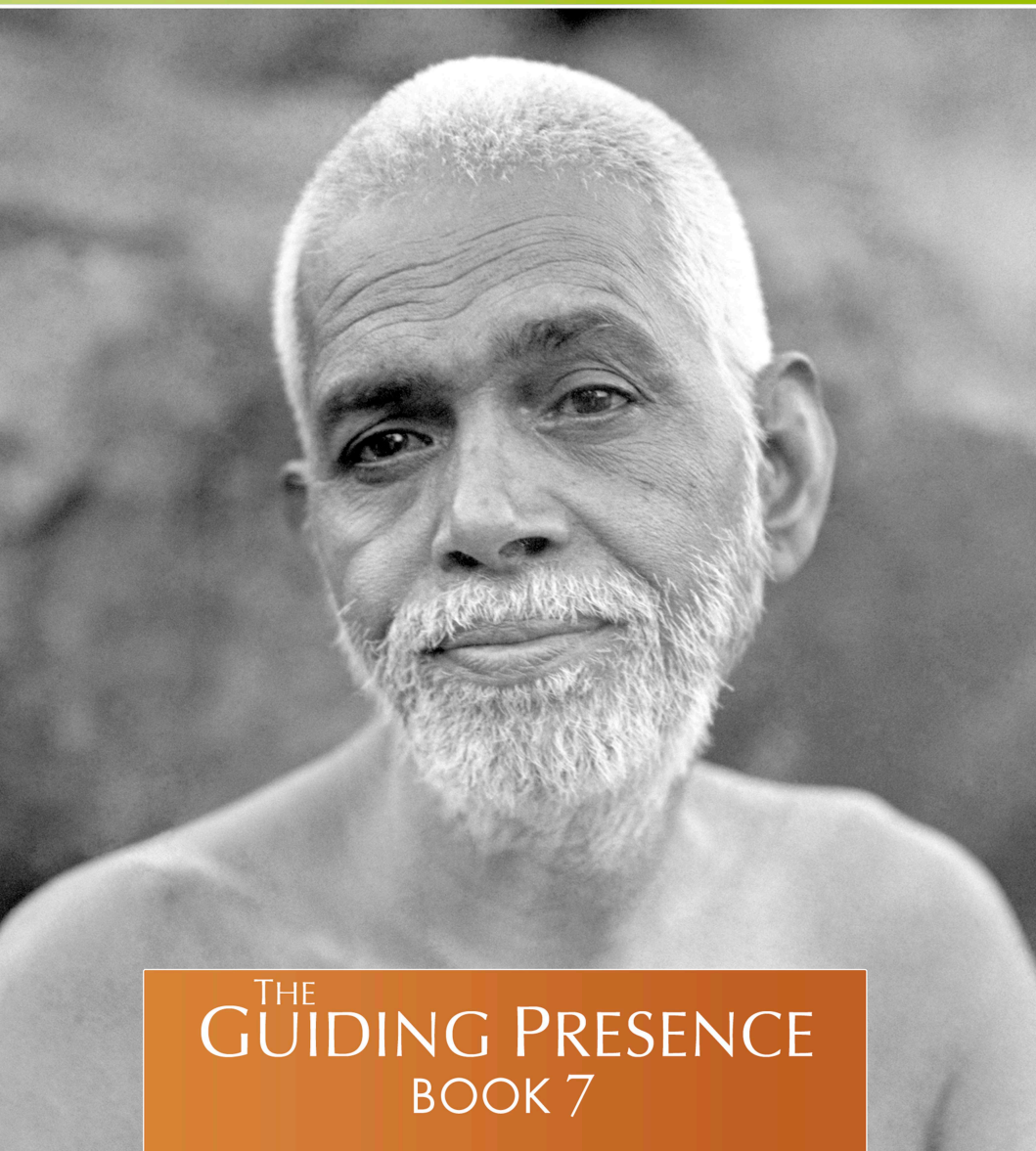


# ARUNACHALA RAMANA

ETERNAL OCEAN OF GRACE



THE  
GUIDING PRESENCE  
BOOK 7

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GUIDING PRESENCE  
BOOK 7



Sri Ramanasramam  
Tiruvannamalai  
INDIA

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**V.S. Ramanan**

President

SRI RAMANASRAMAM

Tiruvannamalai 606 603

Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Email : [ashram@gururamana.org](mailto:ashram@gururamana.org)

Web : [www.sriramanamaharshi.org](http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org)

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கருணா ணவமாய்க் கருதக் கதிநல்  
கருண சலசிவமீ காமம்.



*Lord Siva's glory will not be exhausted even if Goddess Saraswati were to write for eternity using the black mountain as ink, the ocean as the ink-pot, the branch of wish-fulfilling tree as pen and the earth as the writing leaf.*

— Siva Mahimna Stotram

\*\*\* \*\*

*Familiar to Thine ears are the sweet songs of votaries who melt to the very bones with love for Thee, yet let my poor strains also be acceptable, O Arunachala!*

— Akshara Mana Malai

\*\*\* \*\*

*Hill of Patience, bear with my foolish words, (regarding them) as hymns of joy or as Thou please, O Arunachala!"*

— Akshara Mana Malai









## Devi Stuti

samayamayi te dhṛtvā pādāmbujam  
ramaṇaḥ suto  
girivaraguhāsvantaḥ śānto nayedyadi  
nādbhutam |  
sthalavirahataḥ svīyasthāne kimatra  
samāgato  
na vadasi kutaḥ kāryam tasmai  
kulācalakanyake ||34. 8||  
(Uma Sahasram)

Oh, Mother! Daughter of the mountain! Your son Guha has incarnated as Ramana. He now resides in the cave of the great mountain, Arunachala. It is amazing that (such a valiant) Guha has remained so silent and calm. It is not because that he left his place in Kailasa (that he now remains sober). But he has surely come down to fulfill some intention of yours. Why then do you not direct him to do the great task ahead of him? ||34.8||

lohitācaleśvarasya locanatrāyīhitā  
lohitaprabhānimajjadabjajāṇḍakandarā |  
hāsakāntivardhyamānasārasārimaṇḍalā  
vāsamatra me karotu mānase maheśvarī ||36.12||  
(Uma Sahasram)

Oh, Mother! You please all the three eyes of Siva, the Lord of Arunachala! You are like the precipice of the universe which reflects the reddish effulgence! Thy effulgent smile excels in comparison

to the beauty of the moon. May you, the great ruler,  
ever reside in my mind. ||36.12||

**haraṁ prapadye vijaraṁ prapadye svatantratāyās**  
**sadanaṁ prapadye |**  
**ameyasāmarthyavahaṁ prapadye viśuddhaviññānivaraṁ**  
**prapadye || 6 ||**  
*(Prapati Ashtakam)*

To Hara, I surrender; to the never-decaying, I  
surrender; to the abode of independence, I surrender;  
to Him of immeasurable skill, I surrender; to the  
foremost of spotless knowers, I

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

## Introduction to The Guiding Presence

The Guiding Presence presents one hundred and eight articles especially chosen to illustrate the depth and breadth of Bhagavan's influence during that hallowed time when he was physically present in this world. His profound influence continues to inspire to the present day.

Bhagavan himself was inspired by the *Periya Puranam* and often told stories about various saints featured therein. Some of these stories, as told by Bhagavan, are included in the present volume.

The articles include a spectrum of topics which go from "How I came to Bhagavan", to commentaries on the teachings of Bhagavan and detailed accounts of daily interactions. Through these articles the reader gets to feel the Power of His Presence..

As people are different in nature, the perspective of a kaleidoscope of personalities writing about Bhagavan informs the reader in a way that no single author can. Each person's experience with Bhagavan is unique. Some of them are instructive and others are devotional. Every reader will be able to easily relate to the caring compassion of the Master shining through these accounts. Long-standing devotees and occasional visitors write the articles all of whom were touched by Bhagavan in some way. The contributors include Westerners and people from all parts of India. Some of them spent a great deal of time with Bhagavan, some were passing through and were greatly touched by Bhagavan and yet others never ever saw Bhagavan in his body but were, and are, greatly connected to the Maharshi.

The articles have been culled from a wide range of publications including *The Call Divine*, *Mountain Path*, 'The Maharshi' newsletter and 'Saranagati' newsletter. They also include selections from *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, *Ramana Smriti* and other publications. Some of the articles are very short while others are quite long. We have also included the English translation of some poems written by Bhagavan. The translations were seen and corrected by Bhagavan.

All of these articles together paint a picture of the Master's radiant Being and profound influence.

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# THE GUIDING PRESENCE

## 1. Sri Ganesa

One day a potter presented Bhagavan with a small image of Sri Ganesa, the Elephant God, to whom worship must be first offered before worshipping the other deities in a temple. He is also known as the Opener. A disciple who was present at the time suggested that both he and Bhagavan should write verses to celebrate the occasion and this is the verse that Bhagavan wrote. It is used here as the ‘opener’ of the present work.

**Him, who begot you as a child, you made  
Into a beggar; as a child yourself  
You then lived everywhere just to support  
Your own huge belly. I too am a child.  
You Child God in that niche! encountering one  
Born after you, is your heart made of stone?  
I pray you look at me.**

Sri Ganesa, who is depicted as very fat, is one of the two sons of Siva, who became a wandering beggar. Bhagavan identifies himself with the younger brother of Ganesa, Subrahmanian.

## 2. Arunachala\*

“Arunachala! Thou art the Inner Self who dancest in the heart as ‘I’. Heart is Thy name, O Lord.”

– *Five Stanzas to Sri Arunachala*, verse 2.

In the puranas Arunachala is referred to as the oldest hill on Earth and is regarded as the heart of the universe. Scientists have also pointed out the eastern ghats of the Deccan plateau as the oldest land. Arunachala has many names: Arunagiri, Sonagiri, Sudarsanagiri, Annamalai to mention only a few and is also referred to as the *Tejolingam* – the Lingam of fire – which is the formless emblem of Siva.

The form of the Hill is said to resemble *Sri Chakra*, the emblem of the Cosmos with its substratum; and *shaktas* regard this hill as *Sri Chakra* itself. Bhagavan took an active part in the installation of *Sri Chakra* in the temple dedicated to the Mother.

Devotees of Siva consider this divine mountain as the form of Siva who appeared in the midst of Brahma and Vishnu as a column of fire without beginning or end in order to dispel their ignorance after both failed to realise his Presence with the aid of their physical efforts. This signifies the inability of the mind or intellect to go beyond itself. Arunachala is traditionally identified with *Sudarsana* (a form of the chakra or discus of Vishnu). In the form of a deity, *Sri Sudarsana* appears in a fierce aspect, armed with weapons of destruction. When a seeker penetrates beyond the semblance of the Terrible while struggling to overcome what seems terrible in himself – namely the dark downward propensities of his own psyche – Grace reveals itself as Love and Compassion. This, according to Dr. Mees, an authority on symbolism, is the etymology of *Sudarsana* aiming at the destruction of these propensities so as to reveal Love and Beauty.

---

\* Lucia Osborne, *The Mountain Path*, January 1974.

Many saints and sages have sung and composed songs in praise of Arunachala and its import, and some have attained enlightenment here. Sankara also seems to have visited Arunachala. In one of his compositions he calls this Hill ‘Meru’ and says, like Bhagavan, that *Siddha Purushas* are found here. Saint Namasivaya lived in one of the caves, which is still called by his name. His disciple has written the well-known *Annamalai Venba*, a hymn in praise of Arunachala. Another well-known Saiva saint, Virupaksha, also lived in a cave higher up on the slope. It is said to be in the shape of OM – and some devotees have heard there the sound of OM in silent meditation. The saint’s tomb is there and the cave bears his name. Bhagavan spent seventeen years in it and later moved up to Skandasramam where a trickle of water changed overnight to a perennial stream whose water, like that of the Ganges, does not deteriorate with time. Arunagirinathar, another notable saint, is also celebrated for his songs of praise after he received illumination through the grace of Muruga in the Arunachala temple.

When mention was made one day of the tank adjoining the ashram being called *Agastya Thirtam*, the Maharshi was asked if that sage ever visited the Hill. Bhagavan remarked: “Yes, of course, everyone must come here eventually,” meaning that everyone must eventually return to the Source – Arunachala.

Sages have said that one can attain salvation by being born in Tiruvarur, by dying in Benares, worshipping in Chidambaram and by merely thinking of Arunachala. “So worship Arunachala of shining golden lustre for mere remembrance of Him ensures Deliverance,” Bhagavan also affirms.

Bhagavan mentioned that the Hill is one of Light. Sometimes one can see manifestations of lights on the Hill. In the early years, a French devotee, Sujata Sen, once spent the night on the Hill in protest against an order of the management not allowing women devotees to remain in the ashram after

dark. This was the most wonderful time for many devotees when Bhagavan used to sit with them for an hour or so in radiant silence. Sujata dwelt on her grievance one-pointedly. Next morning, she told me that she was taken inside the Hill and found a whole world in it, which she described. I did not pay much attention to this, dismissing it as a dream or imagination. Strangely enough many years later, in 1970 to be precise, another devotee, Mr. S.N. Tandon, had a similar experience which he described in detail in the April issue of *The Mountain Path* that year. It is reminiscent of Dante's inferno, leading by stages to Light, in which all manifestation disappears in the feeling of pure "I-Am" ness.

Sri Viswanatha Swami, who from his adolescence spent many years with Bhagavan, shares with us the following account: Bhagavan said to him one day in the early twenties: "Innumerable are the visions I have had of this Hill, Arunachala. I have seen beautiful groves of trees and fine places inside it. Once I saw a large tank and a big congregation of rishis and yogis seated on a wide plain around it. Every face was familiar and so were the surroundings. A dais was there, and I went up and sat on it with my right hand held up in *Chin-mudra*. It seemed my usual place and my usual pose." *Chin-mudra* is a pose in which the right hand is held up with the thumb and forefinger joined and the three remaining fingers straight up. It is the pose of Dakshinamurti. It denotes the unity of the individual with Brahman, the transcendental Reality beyond the three gunas.

It is said in the puranas that a *Siddha Purusha*, the ancient Teacher in the form of an eternal youth, is present higher up on one of the slopes seated under an enormous banyan tree diffusing His spiritual radiance in silence.

In the early days Bhagavan used to roam a good deal on the Hill. One day he found in a dried up watercourse a banyan leaf of such enormous size that it set him wondering what tree could produce such a leaf. Proceeding further he saw from a distance a huge banyan tree growing on what looked

like sheer rock. Going nearer Bhagavan inadvertently put his foot in a hornet's nest and did not withdraw it till the hornets appeased their anger for being disturbed by badly stinging his leg. Bhagavan did not go near the tree but returned to his abode. Subsequently he firmly discouraged devotees from trying to find the place saying that it was inaccessible and not advisable for them to do so. "It is impossible. I know it!" he told them. "For there shall no man see Me and live" (Exodus 33, 20). The finite ego must die before it can behold and merge with Infinity. Once a whole group of devotees, obviously not yet aware of Bhagavan's injunction, set out to locate the place but they found themselves in such distress that all they prayed for was to be able to turn back safely!

Any endeavour to write about Arunachala is like painting the lily – to borrow an apt expression. It is impossible to present it better or clearer than what Bhagavan himself has done and in this case there is no distinction. Arunachala in the form of Bhagavan speaks about Himself! Like Bhagavan, the Hill comes to life and can appear to us as the Beloved of our heart in indescribable tenderness. What could be dearer, nearer than one's own Self – Arunachala?

"O nectar springing up in the heart of devotees... Haven of my refuge ..."

"The One Self, the sole Reality alone exists eternally. When even the ancient teacher, Dakshinamurti revealed it through speechless eloquence, who else could convey it by speech?"

Bhagavan explained that the universe is like a painting on a screen, the screen being the red Hill, Arunachala. That which rises and sinks is made up of what it rises from. The finality of the universe is Arunachala. Meditating on Arunachala or the Self, there is a vibration 'I'. Tracing the source of 'I', the primal 'I-I' alone remains over – and it is inexpressible. The very first sloka in the Marital Garland of Letters expresses this tersely: "Arunachala! Thou dost root out the ego of those who meditate on Thee in the Heart, O Arunachala."

Bhagavan, who scarcely ever gave advice to devotees unless asked, wholeheartedly approved and encouraged their going round the Hill as conducive to progress in sadhana and very beneficial. He himself set an example by doing it countless times. Worship is expressed by going round the object of worship in silent remembrance or singing bhajans – and not giving way to stray thoughts. One usually goes barefoot. The most auspicious times are full moon days, *Sivaratri* (The Night of Siva) and *Karthikai*, the night when the beacon is lit on top of the Hill. It is said that the pilgrim is accompanied by an invisible host of Siddhas and Rishis. On festival days, the stream of pilgrims in white and brightly coloured clothes resembles garlands of flowers, strewn around Arunachala, wafting their scent in bhajans.

Among the many holy places in India representing different modes of spirituality, Arunachala stands out as the centre of the most direct path, guided by the silent influence of the Guru. It is the centre and the path where physical contact with the Guru is not necessary. The silent teaching acts and speaks direct to the heart. There was something essentially immutable and rocklike in Bhagavan, though he had a thousand faces. He spoke and explained when asked, but his greatest and most inspiring teaching was, like the Hill, like Dakshinamurti, given in silence. Through Bhagavan, the immense potentiality for spiritual regeneration inherent in Arunachala, with which He identified Himself, was brought to life and into focus.

The Benedictory adopted as an auspicious introduction to the Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala was rather puzzling as to who actually wrote those words "... the *Paramatman*, who is the same as Arunachala or Ramana." T.P. Ramachandra Iyer, one of the oldest devotees, who gave up his practice as a lawyer to serve Bhagavan, was consulted and so was Sri Viswanatha Swami. The account of the matter is that one day, when Bhagavan went out of Virupaksha Cave for his usual morning walk, one Amritanadha Yatindra put on Bhagavan's

seat a piece of paper on which he told in a Malayalam verse of his great longing to know who Bhagavan really was – “Are you the manifestation of Lord Vishnu, or Siva, or the great grammarian Vararuchi, or the greatest of *yatis* (renunciates)? ...” His question was couched in classic form and script. When he returned a little later to the cave, he found Bhagavan already back from his walk. On the reverse of the piece of paper was Bhagavan’s reply, also in verse and Malayalam script, rendered with mastery. On reading it, Amritanadha Yatindra felt shaken and in all humility fell at Bhagavan’s feet “like a tall coconut tree cut even at the base,” to use his own words!

The reply was as follows:

“In the lotus-shaped Heart of all, beginning with Vishnu, there shines as Absolute Consciousness the *Paramatman* who is the same as Arunachala-Ramana. When the mind melts with love of Him and reaches the inmost recess of the Heart, wherein He dwells as the Beloved, the subtle eye of pure intellect opens and He reveals Himself as Pure Consciousness.”

“Through the potent Grace of Bhagavan” wrote Arthur Osborne, the founder-editor of *The Mountain Path*, “the path of Self-enquiry was brought within the competence of men and women of this age, was indeed fashioned into a new path that can be followed in the conditions of the modern world with no form or ritual.... This creation of a new path to suit the needs of the age has made Arunachala the spiritual centre of the world. More than ever, now that He has shed His physical body and is one with Arunachala, the Grace and guidance that emanates from Him to those who turn to Him and seek His aid is centred outwardly at Arunachala, to which many are drawn, both those who were disciples of Bhagavan in his lifetime and those who have come later.”

As in the lifetime of Bhagavan, so also now one can turn and speak to Arunachala Ramana far more effectively than in one’s own words, by repeating an appropriate verse chosen



from the Five Hymns to Arunachala which Bhagavan wrote on behalf of His disciples from whom He was not separate. The individual, being only a mode of Absolute Consciousness, struggles against his finitude to regain his primordial state of absolute freedom through Grace. These verses come from the devotees' own heart:

“Even when the thieves of the five senses break in upon me, art Thou not still in my heart, O Arunachala?”

“On seeking Thy Real Self with courage I lost my moorings. Have mercy on me, Arunachala!”

“Unless Thou extend Thy hand of Grace in mercy, I am lost, O Arunachala!”

“Unlovable I am to look at now, yet ornament me with Thy Grace and then regard me, O Arunachala!”

“Thou hast administered the drug of confusion to me, so must I be confounded! Shine Thou as Grace, the cure of all confusion, O Arunachala!”

“Lord! Who art Consciousness Itself reigning over the sublime Sonagiri, forgive the grievous wrongs of this poor self, and by Thy gracious glance benignant as the rain cloud, save me from being lost once more in the dreary waste, or else I cannot ford the grim (stream of universal) manifestation.”

“Lord! Deign to ease me in my weariness struggling like a deer that is trapped. Lord Arunachala! What can be Thy will?”

“O Pure One! If the five elements, the living beings and every manifest thing is nothing but Thy all-embracing Light, how then can I alone be separate from Thee ...”

Bhagavan has given many indications of His continued presence. Ever-present, all-pervading, where could He go? Outwardly manifested and visible as the Hill, He will remain here always guiding as before. Only the body travels – the Self just IS, Bhagavan used to say. His body travelled and disappeared. He just IS as He always has been and the visible support of Grace is Arunachala. It is a great blessing to be able to come here, to stay here. After many years, every day still

seems like a gift. One cannot help feeling the living Presence, radiation and powerful spiritual help accorded to those who seek it, and above all are humble enough to surrender to this influence in faith!

NANDI, the foremost devotee of Siva, said:

“That is the holy place! Of all Arunachala is the most sacred! It is the heart of the world! Know it to be the secret and sacred Heart-centre of Siva! In that place He always abides as the glorious Aruna Hill!”

SIVA said:

“Though in fact fiery, the appearance of a hill on this spot is an effect of grace and loving solicitude for the maintenance of the world. Here I always abide as the Great One (Siddha). Remember that in the interior of my Heart is transcendental glory with all the enjoyments of the world also.

“That, whose sight suffices to remove all demerits which divide Being into countless worlds and egos, is this glorious Arunachala.

“What cannot be acquired without endless pains – the true import of the Vedanta – is easily got by all who can either directly sight this Hill or even mentally think of it from afar.

“I ordain that residence within a radius of three *yojanas* of this Hill shall by itself suffice to burn off all defects...”

DEVI said: “This is always the abode of pious devotees. Those who do evil to others here will, after suffering ills, be destroyed. Wicked persons will be completely bereft of their power to do evil here. Do not fall into the burning fire of the anger of Lord Arunachala, who has assumed the form of the Hill of Fire.”

### 3. Reminiscences of Rangan\*

One day Bhagavan told me “It was your mother that came and saw me here first. Even my mother came only afterwards. Your mother came to me in 1898 when I was at Pavazhakkundru.” She could not bear to see Bhagavan unwashed and practically naked, sitting on the rocks. So while returning home, she took the train and got down to join us at Villupuram and told us of the pitiable sight she saw.

Referring to this incident, Bhagavan later asked me “You all stayed away at Villupuram and sent only your mother. You thought, ‘Why go and see this mendicant fellow?’ Is it not so?” I replied “Bhagavan apparently felt that we couldn’t bear to see him in such a state and so did not give us the conviction then that he was God, an Avatar and a *Jnani*. So we couldn’t come.”

My mother asked Pazhani Swami, who was standing near Bhagavan, if Bhagavan would take fruits. Bhagavan at once stretched out his hand and my mother peeled off the skin from a banana and placed it in Bhagavan’s hand. Bhagavan graciously ate it. When next she asked Pazhani Swami if Bhagavan would walk, Bhagavan got up and walked a few paces. Many years afterwards Bhagavan referred to this incident and with a smile told me, “I even thought of speaking to your mother then, but was afraid that if I did so, she might be emboldened to drag me away by force to Madurai. I used to speak a word or two in those days to Pazhani Swami.”

One day Bhagavan’s mother told me in his presence that once when he was standing she saw various kinds of snakes all over his body, round his neck, chest, waist and legs and got terribly frightened; and that after a while the snakes went back to their places. I believe that was one of the visions vouchsafed by Bhagavan to his mother to wean her from the

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\* *The Call Divine*, January 1955.

belief that Bhagavan was her son and to impress on her that he was God Himself.

Once at Skandasramam when Bhagavan, his mother and I alone were present, mother said as follows: “About ten days ago, at about this time (*i.e.*, 10 a.m.) as I was looking at Bhagavan, his body disappeared gradually into a Lingam like the one in Tiruchuzhi temple. The Lingam was lustrous. First, I could not believe my eyes. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. It was the same sight still. I became frightened that he was leaving us. But again, gradually his body appeared in place of the Lingam.” On hearing this I looked at Bhagavan. He smiled at me. From this I gathered he was confirming mother’s account. When I returned home I mentioned this to the members of my family. My eldest son was writing an account, as he termed it, of Bhagavan’s marriage with his bride *Jnana*, and he included the above incident in it. Later when that work was being read out before Bhagavan by my son, when the portion relating to this incident was read, Bhagavan asked my son, “Who told you this?” And my son replied, “My father.” Thereupon Bhagavan said, “Oh! That fellow came and told you all, is it?” Some of the bhaktas who were listening to this asked what exactly the incident was referred to. Bhagavan passed it over, saying it was nothing. I gathered from the above vision of Bhagavan’s mother that Bhagavan was God himself and that the vision was vouchsafed to mother to impress on her that she was no longer to think of him as her son, but as God Supreme.

One day, when Bhagavan and I were climbing the hill, I told him that because I have had the good fortune to have Bhagavan’s darshan, all my *Sanchita and Agami Karma* have been burnt away like a bale of cotton by a spark of fire, and that only my *Prarabdha Karma* was left. He replied, “Even *Prarabdha* will remain only so long as the mind remains. If the mind is destroyed, to whom is *Prarabdha*? Think over that deeply.” From that I understood that once the

mind is killed and *Jnana* is attained, there is no such thing as *Prarabdha*.

Once a Bhakta having done some *apachara*, i.e. something improper or irreverent towards Bhagavan, he came and asked me what he might do for expiating his offence. I advised him to do *Pradakshina* round Bhagavan three times. He came round Bhagavan three times accordingly, prostrated before him, and said, “Bhagavan should not keep in mind the *apachara* I have committed.” Bhagavan replied, “Where have I mind? It is only if there is a mind I can keep anything there.” It is clear from this Bhagavan has attained *Mano Nasa* (extinction of the mind).

When Bhagavan was in Skandasramam, a gentleman from Malabar, greatly learned and expert in *yoga sastra*, came and lectured for four hours on yoga. After he had finished, Bhagavan said, “Now, you have finished, I hope, all that you wanted to say. The end of all your yoga is seeing lights and hearing sounds. The mind will be in *laya*, i.e., there will be suspension of mental activity, whilst the sound or light is there. When they disappear, the mind will again emerge. The real thing is to achieve *Mano Nasa* or extinction of the mind. That is what is called *Jnana*.” The other man thereupon said, “What you say is the truth,” and took leave of Bhagavan.

I used to pester Bhagavan frequently with my questions. So, one day Bhagavan said, “You are always asking questions. Some devotees come, sit before me and realise what alone has to be known and go away.” I replied, “What is to be done? If you have a dunce for your son, you will have to again and again shout into his ears and teach him.” Bhagavan laughed and remained silent. I realised that many people had become *jivanmuktas* by having Bhagavan’s darshan. Who can describe Bhagavan’s greatness?

While Bhagavan was at Skandasramam, Bhagavan’s mother told me that one bhakta used to grind green ganja leaves and give a ball of it frequently to Bhagavan. Another bhakta one day gave the same stuff in such large quantity

that it might have proven fatal. It seems that day Bhagavan's eyes grew very red and he sat like that the whole day. Telling me this, Mother asked me to request Bhagavan not to take whatever is offered from bhaktas. I then asked that bhakta not to give anymore ganja to Bhagavan. I also requested Bhagavan not to take it thereafter. For that Bhagavan replied, "What to do? I have to take whatever is offered."

One day I noticed Bhagavan's gums had receded. I asked him, "You are younger than me. How is it your gums are already like this?" He replied, "One person, to test me, gave me poison. I took it. It did not take away my life, but it ate up my gums." "There was a Goddess to prevent the poison getting below the neck in Siva's case, but there was none here." I replied.

My son has composed a work in Tamil describing the marriage of Bhagavan, the bride being *jnana*, just as the marriage of Rama or Krishna is elaborately sung in our books. When people of my family sang the above songs before Bhagavan, the bhaktas assembled there remarked, "What is this, they sing of Bhagavan's marriage! Bhagavan left his home and became an ascetic when he was sixteen," and laughed. Then Bhagavan said, "When I was at Skandasramam, a married Brahmin woman used to visit me now and then. Whenever she was present, if we sat for food, she used to place a leaf-plate next to mine and serve on it all the several dishes served to us all. When asked for whom is that plate? She would reply, 'It is for Moksha Lakshmi', the idea being that in the case of *jnani*s, Moksha Lakshmi is always by their side." When asked who that lady was, Bhagavan replied, "I don't know who she is. Nor does mother know."

#### 4. Activity, Help Not Hindrance\*

“Seek to know Brahman by means of tapas (concentration), for tapas is Brahman.”

– *Taittiriya Upanishad*

The earnest aspirant is endowed with one pointedness of mind. But others, whose minds are restless on account of their attachment to the outer world, are asked to practise certain simple spiritual disciplines in order to acquire the concentration of mind which is an indispensable step towards ultimate spiritual attainment.

The urge to be active is strong in man; it is extremely difficult to renounce action altogether and dedicate oneself entirely to spiritual sadhana, whatever be the mode of sadhana.

Thus, of the paths available for an aspirant, *Karma marga* is the most suited to the modern age. By *Karma marga* we do not mean the rituals of the orthodox or social service as generally understood nowadays. By *Karma marga* we mean the performance of one's *svadharma* as determined by one's environment and circumstances. Since action is inescapable, the choice left for one is to follow one's *svadharma* without undue attachment to the results.

What is this *Karma marga* pursued merely as doing one's *svadharma*? It is simply working in an egoless spirit without identifying oneself with the doer. But such egolessness is impossible for the man of the world; he always identifies himself with the doer. *Karma marga* then is the process of inner development which enables one to be active in the world and yet remain unattached to the credit or the results of the work. The sadhana consists in cultivating the attitude that it is not oneself that acts but a Power within. “Doership pertains to the individuality; but you are not a separate individual and so you are not the doer. Man is moved by some mysterious power but he thinks he moves himself,” says Sri Bhagavan.

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\* Viswanatha Swami, *The Mountain Path*, July 1976.

The same idea is conveyed in the *Bhagavad Gita* (XVIII, 61): Mounted as on a machine in the Heart of every being dwells the Lord whirling every being by His mysterious power.

The urge for action is strong in most men; action is their *svabhava*; it is impossible for them to renounce all activity. But the distinguishing characteristic of the karma yogi is that throughout his activity he feels intuitively that he is not the doer, but that the higher power works through him. He is thus merely an instrument of the higher power working for the welfare of all. His work, therefore, is really worship. He asks nothing for himself, seeks nothing, but yet is active. He realises that he is only an actor playing his role in the drama of life, the *Leela* of the Supreme. He does not forget his real being nor does he overplay his role to win fame or personal success. There is no room for desires in him because of his non-identification with a petty individuality.

Such a detached life frees him from the prison of ignorance, though he may be active like others. Is action, without expectation of results, itself enough? Detached action (*nishkama karma*) is only the means to achieve inner purity and therefore one has to strive further in the quest for perfection. The question still persists; who is engaged in such *nishkama karma*? As long as there is a doer there is the need for the experience of pure non-dual Awareness. Hence the karma yogi too has to tread the path of knowledge ultimately. But self-enquiry comes naturally to him. The perfect karma yogi is spontaneously drawn to the path of *jnana* (knowledge). The apparently contradictory paths of karma and *jnana* become complementary to and inseparable from each other. The purity of mind brought about by selfless action points the way to *jnana*. The identification of one's true being with the body-bound ego is the root cause of all selfishness and suffering. Such wrong identification ends only with the dawning of wisdom through the enquiry: 'Who is bound?' – 'Who am I?' When, through uninterrupted experience of Being, the wrong notion of bondage (and liberation therefrom) is dispelled, the



radiance of Pure Awareness alone remains. Sri Bhagavan has clarified for us the path of Self-enquiry starting from selfless action and culminating in the bliss of Pure Awareness.

Inner search for *jnana* together with such disinterested karma is the most practical way for most of us under modern conditions. Leading such a life is fully approved by Sri Bhagavan when he says: “Leave your outward life to *prarabdha* and make intense effort within for illumination.” He has taught us that, while pursuing the path of Self-enquiry, we can carry on our occupation in life, without the least idea of ‘I am doing this’. The idea ‘I-am-the-body’ is the only ignorance and bondage. Performing our work with detachment and enquiring Who Am I? at the same time is the safest course for release from bondage. To do one’s work impersonally and to enquire intensely within ‘Who am I?’ is thus the essence of the teaching of all great Masters.

Bhagavan sums this up aptly: “A man need not give up his worldly duties; what he should give up is desiring things for himself.” The ideal to be aimed at, therefore, is a life of selfless activity accompanied by uninterrupted awareness. The mind that operates without attachment to its own past or future can attend to work of any kind efficiently and in a truly scientific manner. Such a mind is well protected from all ignorance and distraction as it is free from petty, personal desire.

It should be remembered that Sri Bhagavan’s method is not a mere intellectual exercise, but a heuristic and holistic sadhana for self-integration and self-transcendence in which there can be no conflict between awareness and action. The only freedom we enjoy and the only obligation enjoined on us is to turn the searchlight inward and learn to look within. Having once set out on this quest of self-improvement through Self-enquiry, one can no more miss one’s way than a living plant firmly rooted in good soil in the open air can lose its rapport with sunlight. One’s very means of livelihood, the actions that one is called upon to perform, duty to family

and role in society, will undergo the requisite change either through one's volition or by sheer force of circumstance. All things work together for good to them that love God, i.e. for those who have turned towards the Self. For turning to the universal Self is ceasing to be selfish, narrow, personal. The more impersonal the worker, the more scientific and more efficient the work. If disinterestedness is an asset, surrender to the Lord, heightened awareness and empathy with one's fellow-workers, add a new dimension to one's human relations.

The spiritual aspirant who is honest and heroic can thus use even worldly work as a means of self-purification. Much more easily then can the inmate of an ashram adopt the right attitude to activity as a help rather than a hindrance in the spiritual path. There is a lurking fear in some people that their sadhana will be adversely affected by engaging in work or service.

Even granting that sadhana becomes less intense if combined with work, can one assert that one is engaged in sadhana all the time? Unfortunately, the truth is far from this. People who are not prepared to be active in constructive work mostly indulge in casual or loose talk, controversial discussion or even outright gossip. Their own notions of piety also drive them to undertake minor or major jobs for others. The results of such undertakings on individual responsibility are unpredictable.

Thus the problem comes through the back door and has to be faced. It is far better and safer to do allotted tasks than indulge in erratic activity. Rare is the sadhaka who can carry on sadhana on a whole time basis. And it is highly unlikely that such a person will refuse to do service when called upon to do so.

The human tendency that drives one to activity cannot be wished out of existence. This tendency can be sublimated by accepting work or service as a vital and recognised aspect of spiritual practice.

Work, particularly systematic work, has rich rewards. In the higher, spiritual sense gradual purification results. Work in an impersonal and universal cause helps the erosion of the ego. The loss of individuality is easier here than in mundane activity where personal motives have wider and stronger play. The two types of activity are different. Work in the world without is a sadhana for the athletic spirit. Work in an ashram demands less of courage than humility.

Spiritual alertness and physical briskness go together. Spiritual laziness can lead to physical laziness and vice versa. Spiritually evolved persons prove the point conclusively. Sri Bhagavan was always an enthusiastic participant in the Ashram chores. He was the first – to get up (from his apparent sleep) and attend to kitchen duties like cutting of vegetables. He did this for years and years. He had done on numerous occasions jobs like brick-laying and book-binding. There was no task which he deemed beneath him. Apart from this personal example there was also his unmistakable admiration for those who worked hard for the Ashram. His own Ashram on the Hill he named Skandasramam, because one Kandaswami cleared the ground and prepared the site for it single-handed. For the dignity of useful labour there could be no higher testimony than the example of Sri Bhagavan. This does not mean that ashrams should be converted into workhouses and their activities expanded in a mechanical manner. But one should not escape work that needs to be done; one should do one's share of it willingly.

The kind and quantum of work done does not matter as much as the willingness and zeal one puts into it. It should never be forgotten that awareness is our true being, and that action is only a ripple, a movement, a shadow in the ocean of awareness. We should not be in too great a hurry to become agents, we should for the most part be content to be patient. As Wordsworth says: "Action is transitory, a step, a blow, the motion of a muscle, this way or that, 'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:

Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark And shares the nature of infinity.” Whatever action we do – and none of us can altogether escape action, whether in the world or in an ashram – should be surrendered to the Lord, should not boost the ego and should thus help inner purification. In the words of George Herbert:

“Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws, Makes that and the action fine.” It is in this spirit that Appar, the saint who was ever busy tidying up our temples and their environs, sang of the covenant between him and Siva: It is His duty to sustain Even this slave. My duty is Only to serve and be content.

## 5. How Maharshi Helps His Devotees\*

**S**ri Bhagavan was unique, peerless. Why should I say ‘was’? He is unique, and he is peerless.

One gracious look, an understanding nod or a sympathetic word always meant oceans to the earnest seeker, to the aspiring pilgrim. Which sincere voyager has gone to him and returned empty? And which devout sadhaka has sought his guidance and not gotten it?

The intellectual quibbler might have been given the short shrift by him. The dry philosopher might have found in him a steel wall. The eternal doubter would have returned from him not any the better.

But those who have unreservedly surrendered themselves to a pursuit of Truth have never failed to find in him a great guide. And in what infinite ways has he helped the true sadhaks?

Sometimes the sought for guidance would come through an answer given to somebody’s question. Sometimes it would

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\* Major A.W. Chadwick, *Sunday Times*, April 1950. Reprinted in *The Call Divine*, January 1959.

be provided through a direct monosyllabic answer. And sometimes it would come through a subjective experience.

And if the hundreds of pilgrims on the path of spirituality who have sought and received guidance from Sri Bhagavan were to unfold their subjective experiences, the world will know how gracious, compassionate, benevolent and all-pervasive Sri Bhagavan has been and is.

But subjective experiences are intimate, and they are provided only for the personal spiritual advancement of the particular aspirant. It is, therefore, not usually considered necessary to take the world into confidence regarding the subjective experiences of sadhaks. But since I have been invited by the editor to write on how Sri Maharshi has been helping the aspirants, I venture to refer to just one experience of mine.

Once I was going on the eastern side of the Arunachala hill in full belief and confidence that I had unreservedly surrendered myself to Sri Bhagavan. Suddenly I saw a leper woman walking towards me. Her face was terribly disfigured by the disease. Her nose had been completely eaten away and in its place were found two holes. The fingers on her hands had all gone. She advanced towards me and extending the stumps of her hands and asked me to give her something to eat.

The sight of her disgusted me, frightened me. My whole frame shuddered with terror that she might touch me. Overcome by repulsion, I hastened to move away from her. Suddenly, I heard the voice of Sri Bhagavan coming clear and ringing from across the mountains. It said: "To surrender to me is to surrender to everyone, for the Self is in everyone." Hearing this I regained my poise and offered the leper woman the plantains that I had in my bag.

In a few minutes, I saw myself standing before not the disfigured leper woman but before a tall old man with white long hair and beard. The man looked like a rishi and was smiling. When the thought of prostrating before the rishi

entered my mind, I saw before me the old leper woman again. I bowed happy at heart though somewhat confused in mind and then resumed my walk up the hill.

This experience taught me a new lesson and made me tread a new path. I have cited this as just one of the ways through which Sri Bhagavan teaches, guides and helps.

Infinite, indeed, are the ways through which he teaches the aspirant. Since what he has been providing before and what he will continue to provide hereafter is a subjective help to a subjective research, it may not and usually does not produce wondrous ripples on the objective surface. Sri Bhagavan is the one and real Guru. May his grace enfold our being.

## 6. My Life, My Light\*

*Varanasi Subbalakshmi rendered useful service in the Ashram kitchen during the lifetime of Sri Bhagavan. Her chosen God was Lord Viswanath of Benares. However, when she was going to Benares for good she had a dream in which Lord Viswanath told her to return to Arunachala, saying that Bhagavan Ramana was the embodiment of Rama, Krishna, Siva and all other Gods.*

I lost my husband when I was sixteen. I went back to my mother's house and lived there as a widow should, trying to pray to and meditate on God. My mother's mind too was devoted to the spiritual quest and religion was the main thing in her life.

Once we went on a pilgrimage to Kaveri *Pushkaram* and on our way back we stopped at Arunachala. There we were told that a young Brahmin saint had been living on the hill

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\* Varanasi Subbalakshmiamma, Extracts from *Ramana Smriti*, 1980.

for the past ten years. The next morning, we went up the hill along with others with whom we were travelling. At Mulaipal Tirtham we cooked our food, ate and had some rest. Then we went further and found the young Swami near Virupaksha Cave. There was a brick platform at the entrance of the cave and he was sitting on it. As soon as I saw him, I was at once convinced that God Arunachala Himself had come in human form to give salvation to all who approached Him.

He was about thirty at the time, and wonderful to look at; he was bright and shining like burnished gold, his eyes were blooming and clear, like the petals of a lotus. He looked at us for a long time. The peak of Arunachala was towering over our heads, the huge towers of the temple were below, and an immense silence surrounded the Swami. Then the ladies started whispering. One wanted to pray for a child for her daughter-in-law who was barren, but another was saying that the Swami was too exalted for such worldly matters. Finally, the Swami was told of the young wife's sorrow. He smiled and lifted his folded hands to the sky as if saying: "All happens by the will of the Almighty."

We returned to Nellore and the impression of that visit faded away. I did not even dream at that time that my life would be spent at the feet of the Swami.

When I was thirty-one I went to Rameshwaram on a pilgrimage and on my return journey I stopped at Tiruvannamalai. I learned that the Swami was then living at the foot of the hill. That afternoon we went to see him at his Ashram. There was a thatched shed over his mother's samadhi and a tiled hall for meeting the Swami. He was seated on a couch and about a dozen devotees were on the bare floor. We sat in silence for ten minutes and returned to the town.

Bhagavan's presence gave me the experience of inner silence and mental stillness, but away from him I could not regain it and I spent a year vainly trying to free myself from all thought. Some friends were going to see Sri Aurobindo's

Ashram at Pondicherry and they took me along. They were to stay there for a week. I was not much impressed and went for a short visit to Ramanasramam. A learned Shastri whom I knew appeared in my dream and asked me: “Where was the need for you to go to Pondicherry? Entrust yourself to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He is God Himself. He will surely lead you to salvation.”

But even such a clear dream was not enough. I cherished a plan of going to Benares and spending my life there in holy austerities. I decided to go to Bhagavan, learn from him how to meditate, and then leave for Benares for good. My friend Parvatamma decided to join me in the spiritual adventure. Accordingly, we went to Tiruvannamalai and rented a house. In the afternoon we took cashew nuts and sugar candy as an offering to Bhagavan and went to the Ashram. We placed our offerings on a stool before him and sat down. The cow Lakshmi happened to be lying near Bhagavan’s sofa. She got up and began to chew our precious offerings. Bhagavan looked on and said nothing. His attendant, Madhava Swami, did not even look. We thought it might be impious to disturb the cow, but soon I got exasperated and exclaimed, “Please remove the cow!” Madhava Swami replied: “Why? I thought you offered those sweets to Lakshmi!”

### **What is Atma?**

The next day at noon I was again at Ramanasramam. His midday meal over, Bhagavan was reclining on the sofa and explaining a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* to Sri Ramiah Yogi. As no one else was in the hall, I gathered courage and asked: “What is *Atma*? Is it the limitless ether of space or the awareness that cognizes everything?” Bhagavan replied: “To remain without thinking ‘this is *Atma*’ and ‘that is *Atma*’, is itself *Atma*.” He looked at me and I felt my mind melt away into nothing. No thought would come, only the feeling of immense, unutterable peace. My doubts were cleared. Every



day I would visit Bhagavan and listen to his talks with the devotees. Deep in my mind there was the same rock-like stillness, immensely solid and yet strangely vibrant.

Several times I was invited to work in the Ashram, but the Ashram ways were not orthodox enough for me. One day Bhagavan's own sister asked me to take her place in the Ashram, for she had to leave for some time. I could not refuse. At that time Santammal was the chief cook and my duty was to help her. To my great joy Bhagavan was in the kitchen with us most of the time. He taught me to cook tastily and neatly. I would spend all day in the Ashram and in the evening I would go to the town to sleep, for there was no sleeping accommodation for women in the Ashram.

Once Bhagavan said: "You widows do not eat vegetables like drumsticks and radish. Diet restrictions are good to strengthen the will. Besides, the quality of food and the manner of eating have an influence on the mind." I was very happy to work in the kitchen directly under Bhagavan's supervision; yet I wanted to go home. The Ashram ways were too unorthodox for me. And there was too much work. I did not want to work all day long. I wanted to sit quietly and meditate in solitude.

### **I Leave the Ashram**

So, I left again for my village and I went away for about a year. I divided my time between idleness and meditation. Yet my heart was at the Ashram. I would tell myself: "Where is the need of running about. Is not Bhagavan here and everywhere?" But my heart was calling me to Bhagavan. Even when I was pleading with myself, that in the Ashram there would be no time for meditation, my heart would say: "Working in the kitchen by his side is far better than meditation." At home I had all the leisure I wanted, but it seemed to me that I was wasting my time.

Later I learned that that was the time Bhagavan used to remember me very often. Once they were preparing

pongal (pulse with rice and black pepper) to celebrate Bhagavan's monthly birth-star (*Punarvasu*) and Bhagavan told Santammal: "Subbalakshmi is far away yet she worries whether pongal is cooked here today or not." On some other festival day Bhagavan announced: "Subbalakshmi will turn up; keep some pongal for her." That very day I arrived at the Ashram.

His great love for me, a worthless devotee, bound me firmly to his feet. Again and again I wanted to leave the Ashram, but he held me for my good, more powerfully than I held on to him.

Whenever I was collecting courage to tell Bhagavan about my desire to leave, he would seem to read my thoughts and forestall me by giving me something special to do. I felt I had too much to do and that my life was being wasted.

One day Bhagavan was looking at me intently and said: "It looks as if you are still hankering after meditation." I replied: "What have I got except endless work in the kitchen?" Bhagavan said with deep feeling: "Your hands may do the work, but your mind can remain still. You are that which never moves. Realise that and you will find that work is not a strain. But as long as you think that you are the body and that the work is done by you, you will feel your life to be an endless toil. In fact, it is the mind that toils, not the body. Even if your body keeps quiet, will your mind keep quiet too? Even in sleep the mind is busy with its dreams."

I replied: "Yes, Swami, it is as natural for you to know that you are not your body as it is for us to think that we are the body. I had a dream recently in which you were explaining this very point. I was dreaming that I was working in the kitchen and you were having your bath in your usual place behind the bamboo mat partition. You asked: 'Who is it?' I replied:

'Who shall I say I am?' You said: 'Exactly so, you are nothing of which something can be said.' Now, just remember that was my dream and it was quite clear. Why

can't I remember always that I am not the body?" "Because you haven't had enough of it," he smiled.

### **Do Not Torture the Body**

I used to fast quite often, as advised in some scriptural texts. In one of the books, I read: "He who wants to know himself and yet pays attention to his body is like a man who trusts a crocodile to take him across a river." I showed the text to Bhagavan and he explained: "It does not mean that you should starve. You need not torture the body. It only means not giving the body more than it needs. With your mind, hold on to enquiry and just keep the body going so that it does not become a hindrance. For this, pure and fresh food, simply prepared and taken in moderation, is a great help."

Another day I asked Bhagavan's permission to put on the sannyasin's orange robes and beg for my food. He said: "Will coloured clothes give you renunciation? First learn what *sannyasa* means."

Once five or six devotees sat down before Bhagavan and sang a hymn in praise of the Guru. He got up in the middle of the recitation and went away, saying: "Prayers and praises will not take one far. It is the merciful look of the teacher that bestows true knowledge." I felt elated. Had I not received his merciful glances? But the next day he was saying: "Unless one becomes a six-month-old baby there is no hope for him in the realm of Self-knowledge." My heart sank. Although I lived in the presence of Lord Arunachala Himself, I was far from becoming an infant.

### **Why Should You Doubt?**

Another time Bhagavan was telling us stories from the lives of devotees of bygone ages. I questioned him: "It is written that God appeared before the devotee and shed His grace on him while he was still in his mother's womb. Can it be true?" To that Bhagavan replied: "Why should you doubt? Will doubt profit you? Only your devotion will suffer. Those

stories are as real as your telling me that you are present here and now.”

Bhagavan was one day reading and explaining *Tiruppugazh* in Tamil to Alamelu Ammal of Madurai. I did not know Tamil and I could only look on. I saw a change in Bhagavan. A light was shining from within him. His face was radiant, his smile was beaming, his eyes were full of compassion. His words reverberated in the mind and were instantly and deeply understood. All my being was carried upwards on a current of strange vibrations. The memory of this experience is ever present in my heart. A great joy has remained with me that I was privileged to sit at the feet of the Divine Being.

It was ever like this with him. Whoever went to him, he would go down to his level; his words and gestures, even the intonation of his voice, would adapt themselves to the make-up of the people around him. With children he was their playmate, to family people – a wise counsellor, to pundits – a well of knowledge, to yogis – the God of will, the God of victory. He saw himself in them and they saw themselves in him and their hearts would be bound to his feet in everlasting love. All who came to see him would be charmed by his love and kindness, beauty and wisdom, and the overwhelming sense of unity he radiated like fire radiating heat. To some he would grant a special vision, invisible to others; with some he would openly discourse. Crowds would gather round him and each one would see him differently. Even his pictures differ. A stranger would not guess that they are all of the same person.

### **Grant Me Salvation, Swami**

One afternoon a lady from Kumbakonam sat near Bhagavan and exclaimed: “How glad I am that I have met you, Swami. I have craved to see you for a long time, Swami. Not that I want anything, Swami. Only please be kind and grant me salvation, Swami.” With that she got up and went

away. Bhagavan had a hearty laugh. “Look at her – all she wants is salvation. Give her salvation, she wants nothing else.” I said: “Is it not what we all want?”

He replied: “Is salvation something to be handed over on request? Do I keep bundles of salvation concealed about me, that people should ask me for salvation? She said, ‘I do not want anything.’ If it is sincere, that itself is salvation. What is there I can give and what is there they can take?”

Somebody brought a bell to be rung at the *arati* ceremony and it was put into Bhagavan’s hands. He tried its sound in various ways and laughed: “God wants us to make a fire of our past evil deeds and burn our karma in it. But these people burn a copper worth of camphor and hope to please the Almighty. Do they really believe that they can get something for nothing? They do not want to bend to God, they want God to bend to them. In their greed they would swallow God, but they would not let him swallow them. Some boast of their offerings. What have they got to offer? The idol of Vinayaka (Ganesa) is made of jaggery. They break off a piece of it and offer it to Him. The only offering worthy of the Lord is to clear the mind of thoughts and remain steady in the peace of Self.”

In the early days, when I joined the Ashram, Bhagavan used to help in grinding lentils, peeling vegetables and even lending a hand in cooking. He would get up long before daybreak to join the kitchen staff at their work. We ladies would arrive by sunrise, and Bhagavan would see that all was ready for our arrival and we would often find a part of our work already done. To forestall him we would come by five; he would come at four; we would come then at three. When he saw that we were left without sleep, he stopped entering the kitchen before sunrise and gave us time to sleep.

He was the very embodiment of wisdom and kindness, though he did not mind our faults and mistakes, he made us follow his instructions to the letter. We had to do the same task again and again until it was done to his complete

satisfaction. Did he do it for himself? Of what use was it to him? He wanted to prove to us that we could do things right, that only lack of patience and attention causes all the mess. He sometimes seemed too severe, even harsh, to make us do something correctly, for he knew what we did not know – that we can act correctly if we only try. With experience came confidence, and with confidence the great peace of righteousness.

In daily life he avoided all distinction. At work and at food he was one of us. But in the hall, seated on the sofa, he was the great Lord of Kailas, the Holy Mountain. Whenever Bhagavan would enter or leave the hall, we would all get up respectfully. One could see that he did not like so many people being disturbed because of him.

He wanted us to learn well the lesson that God is present in every being in all his glory and fullness and must be given equal reverence. He was tireless in hammering this lesson into our minds and hearts, and he would ruthlessly sacrifice the little comforts we so loved to provide for him, as soon as he noticed a trace of preference. The law that what cannot be shared must not be touched was supreme in his way of dealing with us. Separative and exclusive feelings are the cause of the ‘I’ and therefore the greatest obstacles in the realisation of the One. No wonder he was exterminating them so relentlessly.

Once Bhagavan had jaundice. He had to be put on a fruit diet, but he would not eat fruit unless all ate, and in equal quantities too! Where could we get such a lot of fruit? Yet he was adamant and would leave his share untouched unless he saw an equal share on everybody’s leaf-plate. Those who say that a sick man needs special food and must not give trouble, miss the point. Bhagavan was not sick. His body had jaundice, that was all. He wanted to impress on our minds that under no condition must a man have a greater share. Our learning this lesson was more important to him than the cure of his jaundice.

To serve him at mealtimes was by itself a dangerous adventure. Our womanly desire was to fill him to the brim. His rule was to clear the plate no matter what or how much was served. Not a speck of food would be left uneaten. So, we had to be watchful and serve much less than what we would like to. It was not easy, and we would often fail. He would scold us bitterly, or, what was infinitely worse, would fall ill and suffer. I cannot understand how he managed to produce an illness when a lesson was needed, but our life with him was crisis after crisis.

He would take any amount of trouble to teach us the virtues necessary for self-discovery. Our life in the Ashram was a school of yoga, and a hard school too. For book-knowledge was as nothing to him; only character and genuine spiritual experience counted.

With time he ceased working in the kitchen, but we could still find him in the dining hall. When all would leave after food, he would linger on his seat and we would collect around him and chat and listen to his precious words. He would teach us and guide us, and we would forget the years that passed and be again the happy crowd of yore.

### **Changed to the Very Root of Our Being**

One had to live and work with him to know what a great teacher he was. Through the trifles of daily life, he taught us Vedanta in theory and practice. He led us with absolute wisdom and infinite kindness and we were changed to the very root of our being, not even knowing the depth and scope of his influence. It is only now, after so many years, that we can see the meaning of the orders, prohibitions, scoldings and storms that we had to endure. At that time, we understood so little and just obeyed, because we felt that he was God. Even that feeling we owed to his grace, for from time to time he would let us see him as he really was, the Lord Almighty, and not the human frame to which we were accustomed.

We were women, simple and uneducated. It was our love for him, a reflection of his love, that chained us to his feet and made us stay. For him we gave up hearth and home and all our earthly ties. We only knew that we were safe with him, that in some miraculous way he would take us to our goal. He himself was our goal, our real home. More than that we did not know or care. We were even slow to learn the lesson of equality to man and beast which he was so anxious to teach us first. To us he alone existed. The radiant form of Ramana was enough for us. We did not know that it was not enough, that a human soul must learn to embrace the universe and realise its own presence in every living being. We would concentrate too much on him and resent his compelling us to enlarge our little circle. His sometimes-harsh treatment would bewilder us and make us cry. Now we see that it was love that suffered as it laboured.

Yogis control themselves severely for long to reach the state to which Bhagavan would take us by making us work near him in the kitchen. The small tasks of daily life he would make into avenues to light and bliss. Whoever has not experienced the ecstasy of grinding, the rapture of cooking, the joy of serving idlis to devotees, his devotees, the state when the mind is in the heart and the heart is in him and he is in the work, does not know how much bliss a human heart contains.

Although physically he is no more with us, he still directs us, as in the past. He will not let go his hold on us until we reach the Other Shore. This is our unshaken faith. We may not always be conscious of his guidance, but we are safe in his hands.

Sri Krishna, in His mercy became a cowherd to teach simple milkmaids the way to salvation. Similarly, Bhagavan, the same supreme Being in another form, took to cooking in order to save a few ignorant women. With his eyes he served his devotees the food of the spirit, with his hands – the bread of life.



## **7. Initiation by Look\***

**I**stop in the Gratitude Hut during my walking meditation. Upon entering, my eyes immediately become fixed on a large photo of Ramana Maharshi which hangs on the wall. I cannot take my eyes off of him. I am magnetized. It seems he, too, is looking directly at me.

As I gaze into his eyes, his image takes on a form that seems lifelike, multidimensional; it's as if he is right here, now. His face becomes luminous and his expression softens, as if to say, "Yes, I am looking at you." A couple of more crow's feet appear at the outer edges of his twinkling eyes and his lips turn up ever so gently as he smiles warmly at me. His kind look is penetrating; truly, it's as if he is looking into me and through me. I feel a profound sense of intimacy, into-me-see, of being seen so completely and fully in this moment.

Something shifts ever so slightly, and his eyes take the form of luminous white fire. I feel a burning sensation. No longer am I the object of his gaze; I experience myself gazing into myself – subject and object at once. I am seeing myself through his eyes. He is showing me my own True Nature! It is as if Sri Ramana is lending me his eyes so that I can see what he sees – the Self that I Am.

Tears stream down my face and I am filled with a profound sense of wonder, and awe, and connection. I sense that I am not separate, or alone; in this moment all are one – the wooden hut and the photo and Sri Bhagavan and I, and the trees and the sunlight, and then, in this new moment, I am Formlessness, Timelessness, Consciousness.

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\* Ann Osborne, 'The Maharshi' newsletter, Nov-Dec 2011.

## 8. Bhagavan Sri Ramana is Personally Present Here\*

**B**hagavan Ramana is personally present here. To demand proof is like wanting proof that the sun is shining overhead. His presence is known or ‘seen’ by those with eyes to see. For others even a positive proof would be useless.

If a few phenomenal incidents are cited to prove his personal presence here, the logical mind may well dismiss them all as too fantastic or merely imagination. A man of faith could accept the facts on hearing them but would that instill conviction of Ramana’s presence as a living reality?

For those who come to visit Ramanasramam, I would like to offer my advice. Please do not come like a tourist merely with an idea that you are going to sightseeing an Ashram even if it bears the name of one of the greatest Rishis of modern times. Don’t go through the ritual of offering prayers and puja at various shrines, receiving *prasadam* and *vibhuti* only to go back satisfied that you have ‘done’ with another holy place.

Of course, visiting holy places does have a great effect, but that in itself is not enough. It may be enough for the uninitiated, but seekers of the Truth require a sense of holy presence, such as can be experienced at Ramanasramam. It is a fact that Bhagavan is here.

Towards the end of his bodily manifestation, he said, “They say that I am going, but where can I go? I am here.”

Once when someone wrote a booklet criticising Ramanasramam, Bhagavan remarked that the author had done a great service to the cause of Truth. When asked for an explanation, he said that this book would keep away the insincere and superficial people and only the sincere Truth-seekers would continue to come. In the same way the Maharshi himself has done a great service to the cause of

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\* Sri Swatantra, *The Mountain Path*, January 1974.

Truth by withdrawing himself from the physical plane. He has made himself unavailable to the worldly eye, while to the seeker with spiritual sight his living presence is very much here.

## 9. The Secret Operation of Grace\*

Ramana would always remind the visitors and devotees seeking assurance of His Grace that it is there all along, that it is synonymous with God and the Self. Ramana was emphatic about the “Self revealing immediacy of divine grace” and would compare failure to perceive it to the poor vision of the “owl which cannot see the sun” or to those buds “which do not blossom on sunrise”. He once remarked. “People come and tell me that I must grant Grace. They seem to think that I keep it under lock and key. I am always giving it. If it cannot be comprehended what can I do?”

How then is His Grace vouchsafed? What does it mean to be ‘clothed’ and ‘ornamented’ by His Grace? Ramana’s Grace means different things to different people. It is ordinarily taken to mean His intervention for altering the course of events. The following illustrations are typical: a devotee suggested to her friend to keep Ramana’s picture with her so that her husband might return to her, and reported after some time in the hall that her prayers had been answered. Another devotee present in the hall asked, “What is impossible for Bhagavan?” adding that he had advised a friend that he could continue in Madras, for physical proximity of Bhagavan, if only he prayed to Him for that. Devotees would send telegrams and letters to Sri Ramanasramam to be placed before Ramana for curing ailments of their dear ones.

Even as the telegram or letter was being despatched there would be relief and miraculous cure which would be attributed

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\* A.R. Natarajan, *The Mountain Path*, October 1982.

to His grace. Many instances are narrated in *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and *Sri Ramana Reminiscences* of persons turning to Him in their hour of need, and invariably getting succour. Ramana Himself would, however, dismiss these visible signs of His Grace as being only the automatic intervention of a higher power when matters are brought to the notice of a *jnani*. The following conversation which Ramana had with Sri Subbaramayya is germane: “Bhagavan, did you not think that you must do something to save the child?” Straight came His answer, “Even the thought of saving the child is a *sankalpa* and one who has any *sankalpa* is not a *Jnani*. In fact such thinking is unnecessary. The moment the *jnani*’s eye falls upon a thing, there starts a divine, automatic action which itself leads to the highest good”. Such instances are no doubt important in kindling and sustaining faith in Ramana’s divinity and the inspired nature of His teachings. The first overt act of grace, however, is the awakening of interest in the search for Truth and for finding the meaning of Life. To be saved from the quagmire and quicksand of a life of identification with the body, centred on sensate pulls, is truly Ramana’s Grace. For millions are lost in worldliness. “Remembrance is the forerunner of Grace. That is the response, that is the stimulus, that is Grace”.

To be exposed to the simple and direct path of Ramana for returning to the source, to our natural state of happiness, is the next step, as it were, in the chain of his directed Grace’ for one could lose oneself in the labyrinth of purely mental, spiritual practices. For the search into the source of the ego, the vital sustenance and support is His Grace, for that pushes the mind inward.

Till one becomes established in the divine milieu one undergoes the torture of “one suspended between life and death”. We are often in a halfway house, having neither anchorage in the Self nor in the body. Old tendencies lash at us, as it were, forcing the mind outward and the joy of Self-abidance is far too weak or intermittent to act as a

countervailing force to pull the mind inward. At this juncture, grace is needed most.

Ramana Himself once quoted Nayana (Ganapati Muni) as saying: “In going forward one can run any distance at any speed, but when it is a question of going backward, that is, turning inward, even one step is hard to take”. The capacity of the mind to be fully focussed on the ‘I’ thought is not strong enough on many an occasion. Ramana Himself puts this situation very clearly in The Marital garland, when He says, “seeking you with my weak mind I have come back empty-handed. Aid me O Arunachala!”

In the inward journey too one could be lost by mistaking ‘lulling of the mind’ as being the end of the journey. The case of Sankarananda, a devotee saved by Ramana, would serve to bring out this point. Sankarananda would sit for long hours in the hall. While meditating he would be overtaken by spells of ‘stillness of thought’. To get him out of this state, Ramana would request Sri Kunju Swami and Sri Viswanatha Swami to take him out to the temple or for a walk to the lake to draw himself out for no further progress would be possible otherwise. It is Ramana’s Grace alone which enables one to cross this stage and push inward, deeper, to the zone of the Self. Giving the strength for persisting in the enquiry upto the point where it is required before ‘letting go’ to be ‘swallowed alive’ and becoming ‘inundated’ by the sea of bliss of the Self. “Grace is thus the beginning and end, introversion is due to Grace; perseverance is Grace and realisation is Grace.” So important is grace for the search and Self-abidance that Ramana uses the expression as many as fifty-one times in the Marital Garland of Letters.

Again, it is the Grace of Ramana which enables us to be aware where exactly our true freedom lies. The first instruction which he gave to His mother was that events are preordained according to the divine law. In response to questions put to Him, he would emphasise this fact. Years later, Ramana told Paul Brunton, “He who has given life to the world knows how

to look after it also. He bears the burden of the world, not you.” He would at the same time point out that “the pathway to freedom” “lies in not identifying oneself with the body and by not being affected by pleasures and pains consequent on the body’s activities.”

The feeling that we are utterly helpless and incapable of shaping events and circumstances according to our choice increases. The ability to cast the ‘burden of care’ on the supreme power who sustains all things comes about as one learns to “let go” and “lose” oneself in the flood tide of Ramana’s Grace.

Self-enquiry and surrender are possible only by His Grace which operates unnoticed like the morning dew, cleansing the mind both of its self-regarding activity and its laziness. Borrowing His words, we often wonder who it is that has “secretly entered the mind and stolen our heart”. He is ‘the sacred treasure of Grace’ coming to us uninvited, without notice, biding His time to reach and destroy the vitals of our ego.

The secret of this alchemy of Grace is not known for, like a spider, Ramana holds us tight in his gracious orbit to consume us at His hour. But one thing is certain. He is like ‘the mighty Aruna Hill’, ‘the life-destroyer’ and He too has ‘raised the flag vowing the death of the ego of his devotees’.

It is for this reason that he would generally not encourage evaluation of one’s spiritual progress. Once we have entrusted ourselves to His care, care he will and it would be His concern to look after us.

What indeed would have been our lot had He contended Himself with just enjoying the Bliss of Self abidance! But Ramana graciously accepts the responsibility and becomes our helmsman, our staff and support in the spiritual journey. Two instances illustrate this:

Balarama Reddy would pay obeisance, along with a loving offering, to the Maharshi early every morning and pursue self-enquiry in the privacy of his own apartment.

He was not yet aware of the transforming influence of the physical proximity of Ramana. Ramana noticed this. When His broad hint failed, he literally thrust His grace on Reddy by a mock anger, which made him realise the immeasurable advantage of ‘questing within’ in Ramana’s presence.

A leaf from Sri T.K. Sundaresa Iyer’s diary is also worth extracting in this context. “One day I wondered why I was visiting Him at all. What was the use? There seemed to be no inner advancement. Going up to the Hill was meaningless toil. I decided to end my visits on the hill. For one hundred days exactly I did not see Bhagavan. On the hundred and first day, I could suffer no longer and I ran to Skandasram above Virupaksha cave. Bhagavan saw me climbing, got up and came forward to meet me. When I fell at His feet, I could not restrain myself and burst out in tears. I clung to them and would not get up. Bhagavan lifted me up and asked: ‘It is over three months since I saw you. Where were you?’ I told him how I thought that seeing Him was of no use. ‘All right’ he said, ‘May be it is of no use, so what? You felt the loss, did you not?’ Then I understood that we did not go to him for profit, but because away from him there was no life for us!”

The steady light of Ramana’s Grace will do its work shining like the golden rays of the rising Sun, enabling us to abide, forever, sunk deep in the Ocean of Bliss.

## **10. Sri Dakshinamurti and Sri Ramana\***

**B**hagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi has often been compared to Sri Dakshinamurti, who sits silently under the banyan tree on the north slope of Arunachala, and there is much ground for this comparison. Moreover, it is more than just a comparison. Actually, the two are identical, although their

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\* Sadhu Arunachala (Major A.W. Chadwick), *The Call Divine*, 1953.

bodies may seem different to us who are bound by the limitations of time and space.

Sri Dakshinamurti has retreated to an inaccessible vastness, no longer to be reached by humans, and we can only surmise that this is because he found the world unworthy and unable to understand his silent instruction, whereas in the form of Sri Ramana he was always most accessible and explained to one and all the meaning of this silence; if they did not listen, well, the seed would bear fruit on some future occasion. Nothing was ever wasted; for him there was no time and so there could be no disappointment.

Strangely, Bhagavan (as we all used to call Sri Ramana) once found himself in the proximity of the Silent Guru. He had gone off on a ramble about the slopes of the hill when he saw a very large banyan leaf lying in his path. So struck was he by this that he set off in search of its source. At length he came within sight of an uncommonly large tree, which he thought must be the one for which he was looking. But he could not reach it, his way was blocked by a wall of sheer rock; at the same time, he was attacked by a swarm of wasps whose nest he had unwittingly disturbed. Thus, realising that he was not destined to proceed, he returned. After this event, he discouraged his disciples who proposed to explore the Hill in quest of the same spot. "You will not succeed in any way," he would tell them. And though occasionally some would ignore his advice, nobody ever did succeed in getting a glimpse of the enormous tree.

Both Sri Dakshinamurti and Sri Ramana taught exactly the same teaching that can be fully expounded in silence. As soon as words are used we are in the realm of the relative and for Bhagavan there was no relative. It was only a fictitious appearance of Reality which is One (Advaita).

"Make an effort to be without effort," he would say. In fact, don't do anything, because actually there is nothing to do. The whole trouble with us all is this constant doing. By associating ourselves with all sorts of actions and circumstances we place



apparent limitations on the Illimitable. How can speech do more than point out to us our mistake? It can tell us only to ‘be’, not to be this or to be that, because being this or that is back again in the realm of limitation and it is just exactly this that he is trying to make us understand.

And is there really any method of reaching that which is eternally and forever here and now? Yes, Sri Ramana taught Self-enquiry. Find out who is this eternal and ever-conscious being that you really are by inquiring ‘Who am I?’ But that was all. In other words, ‘Just be yourself,’ and to be yourself you must get behind phenomena to the Eternal Witness and this can only be done by Self-enquiry.

However, sometimes Sri Bhagavan would expound philosophy by the hour to clear the doubts of his many visitors, yet he always explained that this was actually quite unnecessary. There was only one thing to know and do. Silence was best. Once when he saw me puzzling over the intricate division and recombination of the elements in an Advaitic treatise that he had told me to read, he turned to someone sitting before him and said, “Tell him not to worry over all that, that is for those people who demand that sort of thing, who want analytical explanation of everything. Let him read the rest which he can understand.”

Sri Ramana has stated explicitly that he himself never at any time did any sadhana. “Sometimes I would sit with my eyes closed and sometimes with them open. I still do. But I know no mantra or yogic exercises and would not have any use for them if I did.” And it is certain that he never taught any of these things. He told us how to set about Self-enquiry and advised certain rules of life that would facilitate this, but that was all. He says in the little book *Who am I?* “Regulation of diet, restricting it to sattvic food taken in moderate quantities, is of all rules of conduct the best, and is most conducive to the development of sattvic qualities of the mind. These, in their turn, assist us in the practice of *Atma Vichara* or enquiry in quest of the Self.” For the mind is the product of the food we

eat, he explained. Purify the food and the mind automatically becomes pure. Again: “Likes and dislikes, love and hatred are equally to be eschewed. Nor is it proper to let the mind rest often on the affairs of worldly life. As far as possible one should not interfere in the affairs of others. Everything offered to others is really an offering to oneself; and if only this is realised, who is there that could refuse anything to others?” Let me quote once again: “If the ego rises all else will arise, if it subsides all else will also subside. The deeper the humility with which we conduct ourselves the better it is for us. If only the mind is kept under control, what matters it where one may happen to be?”

It all sounds so simple put like this, and yet how many of us succeed? No question hereof going off and taking *sannyasa*, for as he says: “Renunciation is not discarding external things, but the cancellation of the uprising ego.” And this can quite possibly be done more effectively in the world and in the midst of family life. For to the determined seeker some opposition is good; it gives him something to work on and keeps him alert, just as the airplane needs the opposition of the air to hold it aloft.

Bhagavan was always very definite in pointing out that liberation is not some far-off, after-death experience. It is here and now for all of us always. Just drop the false association with limitation. Nothing new will happen, and we shall then see that we have been all along the Self that we were searching for. Sri Ramana was no missionary trying to drive people along a definite track. Did he not know far better than we that everything would come to fruition at its proper time, there was no forcing it?

A certain number of people were bound to come to him, and a few were able to remain permanently. It was just their karma. Once when a visitor was taking leave and with tears complained that he could not remain any longer, Bhagavan remarked in a very matter of fact way that if everybody who came remained, there would not be any room for anybody.

For a person who believed in reforms and all sorts of charitable activity, his advice was: “First help yourself and then you may be able to help others. How can you possibly do any good to others when you yourself are still only seeking for the Good?” Such activity amounts to starting out at the wrong end.

People who never came to him have often said that his was a negative philosophy, but this is only ignorance of the truth. He was a dynamic force himself and he never advised the inaction of inertia. “Do, but do not associate yourself with the doer. Be the witness always,” was his message. Things will undoubtedly go on, and as long as we imagine ourselves to be the body we will naturally believe that we perform the various activities ourselves. It is absolutely useless to sit back and say: “I am not the body, so there is no need to do anything;” this is only a catch phrase of intellectualism. We do not really believe it to be true, so it only reveals our hypocrisy. When we do actually know the Truth, we shall never talk like that. For the real sannyasin, he has said, there is no difference between solitude and active life, as he does not regard himself as the doer in either case.

Sri Ramana’s message was for one and all, and so no one, whatever his occupation, need say that he has no time, for his teaching is to be practised now and always, whatever we may be doing, whether it be working, resting, eating or sleeping.

At the end of *Catechism of Enquiry, (Self-Enquiry)* it is said: “It is within our power to adopt a simple and nutritious diet, and with earnest and incessant endeavour, eradicate the ego, the cause of all misery, by canceling all mental activities born of the ego (i.e., the idea “I am the doer”). Can obsessing thought arise without the ego, and can there be illusion apart from such thought?”

And in these few words are summed up the whole of the teaching of the great Sage of Arunachala who was in fact none other than Sri Dakshinamurti in mortal form. And

even now though Sri Ramana has left his body, where is the difference? Does he not exactly come up to the definition of Sri Dakshinamurti as given by Sri Sundararaja Sarma in his commentary on the slokas of Sri Sankaracharya? *Sri* – Sakti, *Dakshin* – Perfect, *Amurti* – formless, or “the ever-perfect, invisible power,” as one might term it.

The first verse of the *Sri Dakshinamurti Stotra* by Sri Sankaracharya declares the same: “I bow to Sri Dakshinamurti in the form of my Guru; I bow to him by whose Grace the whole world is found to exist entirely in the mind, like a city’s image mirrored in a glass, though like a dream, through Maya’s power it appears outside; and by whose Grace, again, on the dawn of Knowledge it is perceived as the everlasting and non-dual Self.”

But of a truth the Self is one. When we have reached that state of knowledge, when we live in the Self alone and see the world for what it is, we too shall find that both Sri Dakshinamurti and Sri Ramana are and ever have been enthroned in our hearts. Let us pray earnestly that the dawn of that day may be near at hand.

## 11. The Hill\*

What is it about Arunachala that attracts some people to the point of obsession? There are some who, once ensnared, find it almost impossible to leave; there are others who pass by and barely notice it. You drive along the main road in either direction and the countryside is more or less littered with hills of a similar size and configuration. Why should this pile of earth and rocks be in any way different? Yet different it most assuredly is. None of the other prominences has the power, presence, or sheer personality and exuberance of Arunachala. Even Bhagavan, if he could be said to be attached

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\* Katya Osborne, *The Mountain Path*, April 2005.

to anything, was attached to this place. On the face of it, it is an inexplicable mystery; yet it is nonetheless a fact and therefore worth trying to explain. In the myths of antiquity, Arunachala was acknowledged to be the incarnation of Lord Siva on earth as the Lord of Fire. Physically it is a hill, or small mountain, some 2,668 feet above sea level, of apparently unremarkable rocks physically indistinguishable from any others in this landscape of scattered hills dotted about on the hot plains. Bhagavan treated Arunachala as a living manifestation of God, and as such it is hard to describe. A person cannot be truly conjured up by a catalogue of physical details, and yet any other sort of description is even harder to arrive at. To those who are in tune with it, Arunachala is a microcosm of the world. Its signature on the landscape is so powerful that it seems to distort one's inner compass; no hill this, but an overwhelming presence that makes everything else around seem shadowy and unreal. It also acts like a prism to intensify all the senses and emotions. Colours seem brighter; the taste of food is sharper; the very act of breathing is not just the drawing in of whatever comprises the local atmosphere, rather it is an effervescent inhalation of invigorating power. Every sensation seems to be keener; love is stronger, but then so too is hate. Having heightened senses works both ways, which is why people come to Arunachala. They hope for release and enlightenment, but the corollary is that all one's negative aspects are also highlighted. They can be dealt with or given in to, according to the personal application of the individual. People who resonate with the Hill have a unique opportunity to deal with all the troublesome facets of their characters, to recognise them and try to eliminate them; they also have the possibility of elevating their least desirable qualities and this can happen so slyly that it almost goes unnoticed. Small skirmishes can become major wars and a mild interest in one's neighbours can become malicious gossip. In the same spirit, a lack of interest in personal possessions can become genuine

renunciation and ordinary thoughtfulness can transmogrify into true spirituality.

It is a mistake to suppose that everything within the ambit of the Hill is benign. People have been robbed, raped, and have even died on the Hill. Others have lived there as renunciates, untroubled in a cave for years. Still others have carried on a lifelong love affair with it.

Whatever happens in the world at large also happens on or around the Hill...but more so. Addicts to this sort of intense living find it hard to revert to black and white after the glories of Technicolor. These are the people who cannot keep away for long. Whatever the outside world has to offer pales into insignificance when compared to the concentrated wealth of emotion engendered by Arunachala; although this amount of sheer cosmic power is hard to contain and can sometimes cause the mind to spin out of control, which may be the reason why some people who come to Tiruvannamalai either are, or become, unbalanced. It is dangerous to underestimate the intensity of this place.

Another attribute of the Hill is its healing powers. Known also as the ‘Medicinal Hill’, this can be a reference to the many therapeutic herbs to be found on it, but it can also be an allusion to total holistic healing, in fact to the immense feeling of well-being that emanates from anywhere within the aura of Arunachala. The many special attributes of this sacred place have been recognised from time immemorial. Possibly, in ancient days, when people were more attuned to natural forces, the power of Arunachala was more apparent to everyone and its manifestation was acknowledged by all. Certainly many shrines and temples, some of enormous antiquity, festoon the *pradakshina* road and legendary stories of the sanctity of the hill proliferate in the scriptures. It is an eloquent confirmation of the abiding authority of this place that its influence has not evaporated over the millennia; indeed, it is apparently just as strong now as it ever was.

Whether the source is geological, due to a concentration of magnetism in its structure, or whether it is purely spiritual due to causes we cannot understand, the fact remains that the power is there and so strong that it is almost tangible. Some interested people have gone to the trouble of measuring the distance from which the aura of the hill can be felt and they came up with a figure of a 40 km radius. This may or may not be accurate, but in any case it is irrelevant. For Bhagavan the Hill was his guru and he walked around it, climbed up it and composed songs to it. Indeed, it was the Hill that drew him to Tiruvannamalai in the first place.

The solace that some people find within the radius of the hill is alluring and addictive. Historically people have looked for sacred places upon which to build their altars, temples or any other place of worship. A hill was felt to be a fitting location from which to praise God. With Arunachala however, although many shrines have been built at its feet and Bhagavan himself lived in a cave on its slopes for some years, no one has ever even considered building any structure on the summit. It would seem like a desecration. At least that was the feeling of respect which Arunachala engendered until recently. Nowadays, possibly as a sign of the *Kali Yuga*, the summit of the hill is disfigured by shoddy shacks and there are a number of quite aggressive ‘sadhus’ who demand money from pilgrims. In the past this was never the spirit on the hill. It was enough that at the festival of Deepam a huge copper cauldron was hauled up to the top from the big temple. Pilgrims clustered around and thronged the pathways to the peak, each one bearing gifts of ghee to fill the container. On Deepam night, the flame is lit, not by Brahmin priests but by ancient custom, it is done by simple townspeople. For ten days, the flame is kept alight while everyone honours Siva in his aspect of Lord of Fire. No one can say how old this ceremony is; certainly it goes back beyond the era when records were kept. Lost in the dim past is the origin of the feeling of awe and reverence engendered by Arunachala. But

whatever its source, the hill's spontaneous attraction still exists, and is experienced by so many people, even those who first came to the Hill expecting nothing at all. It speaks eloquently of the power of Lord Siva in whatever incarnation he chooses.

## 12. Excerpts from the Prayer Manuscript\*

Just to abide in the cavity of the lotus of my Heart is the greatest gift from Sri Ramana Bhagavan to me and how I pray He keep me glued to His Lotus Feet once and for all. His Sri Arunachala Ashram, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Centre and this Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram in the Annapolis Valley of Peace and Happiness are here as a result of His Infinite Grace and Mercy. I must declare to the world that they would not have been brought into existence without His Infinite Grace and Mercy. So I shall have to remember day and night that Sri Ramana Arunachala Dakshinamurti Sachchidananda Parabrahman is looking after all of His loving sons and dear daughters and we have to move on, march on, press on and push on towards the goal that must be reached without any further delay. But we are simply the most infinitesimal instruments of the Mighty Maharshi and He is the Doer behind each and everything in this world. In the bright sunshine of the autumn, the Annapolis Valley is glistening, sparkling and shining with warmth, love and affection and I have no other choice left to me but to turn to the Self within the cave of my Heart in this far-off land.

There has never been the least shadow of doubt within me that my destiny is linked up with my Master and Lord, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and the time has come that I must trudge along, trudge along, to the Holy Hill of the

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\* Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, 'The Maharshi' newsletter, Mar/Apr 2006.



Beacon Light. The unceasing inherence in the Self in the cavity of the lotus of my Heart must remain that focal point of my remaining days. When I close my eyes, I find myself transformed into the ant that knows nothing else in this world but His Lotus Feet. No amount of my efforts and endeavours can be of any avail in this world without His Infinite Grace and Mercy. I beg and beseech Him to cut asunder the knot of nescience from my Heart and melt me into the Holy Arunachala Mountain. I am standing on this sacred soil of Sri Arunachala Ashram in this Annapolis Valley at the southern foot of the North Mountain and am calling on Bhagavan Sri Ramana to remove the densest darkness of desires and delusions from my life and give me the ceaseless inherence in the Self, once and for all. My breath is merged in my Heart and I feel like doing nothing but remaining calm and quiet all the time. I walk around His Ashram like one possessed and I can now do nothing but abide in the Self, nothing but the Self, within my Heart Cavity. I am prostrate at the lotus Feet of Sri Ramana Arunachala Dakshinamurti Guru.

Bhagavan Ramana has established His Abode for the sake of all those devotees and disciples who are eager and earnest to profit from His Most Direct and Simple Teaching of ‘Who Am I’. Sri Bhagavan is ever kind and compassionate to me and He gives us the friendship of such persons who are ever ready to sacrifice their life for the sake of keeping His Banner fluttering in the open air. Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram is standing on the southern side of the field and adding grandeur and luster to the world. Each and every single second of my sojourn in this land is the firmest reminder to me that I must cling to His Lotus Feet. My Heart is unceasingly repeating His most blissful and potent Name ‘Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya’ and this is the be all and end all for me Sri Arunachala Ramana Dakshinamurti Sadguru.

### 13. Sri Bhagavan's Teachings\*

1. *Japa* of 'Koham' (Who am I?) is not correct. Put the question once and then concentrate on finding the source of the ego and preventing occurrence of thoughts.

2. You should not attend to the breathing, if you are capable of concentrating on the enquiry without it. Some may have to attend to the breathing if unable to concentrate on the enquiry alone. Some may practise *Kevala Kumbhaka* during the enquiry. Some may require the help of regular pranayama also to steady the mind and control the thoughts. All these practices are to be given up when the mind becomes strong enough to pursue the enquiry without their aid. Pranayama is to be practised with the usual caution. It will gradually increase the power and duration of the *Kumbhaka*. It will make the mind one-pointed. Take its help if unable to concentrate without it. Pranayama is like reins to control the mind-horse, or like brakes to control the wheels of thought... "Who am I?" and "whence am I?" are one and the same. They refer to the ego only. No such questions can be asked in the case of the Real Self.

3. Suggestive replies such as *Sivoham* (I am Siva) etc., to the Enquiry, are not to be given to the mind during the meditation. The true answer will come by itself. Any answer the ego may give cannot be correct. These affirmations or auto-suggestions may be of help to those who follow other methods, but not in this method of Enquiry. If you go on asking, the reply will come. The method of enquiry is Dhyana, and the effortless state is *Jnana*.

4. "I" is also a Guru-mantra. The first name of God is "I". (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says, '*Aham nama abhavat*' or "He became 'I' named") Even OM comes later. *Atma* or the real Self is always saying 'I-I'. There is no mantra without the person who does the *Japa* i.e., *aham*. The *japa* of *aham*

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\* Sri D.C.D., *The Call Divine*, June 1953.

is always going on within, *Japa* leads to Dhyana and Dhyana leads to *Jnana*. You may practise saguna meditation or the method of Enquiry according to your inclination. Only that method will appeal to a person, which is most suitable for him.

5. Without losing hold of the knowledge of “Who you are”, you may continue all activities as prompted to perform by the inner controller. They will go on even without your efforts. What you are destined to do, you cannot avoid. They will come your way of their own accord. You should also understand what *Japa*, Kirtans etc. are meant for. The real *Japa* is always going on. *Japa* and God are one and the same. See the philosophy of the Name as given by Saint.

6. In the Enquiry, “I” refers to the ego.

7. Don’t entertain such thoughts of imperfection, lack of qualities etc. You are already perfect. Get rid of the ideas of imperfection and need for development. There is nothing to realise or annihilate. You are the Self. The ego does not exist. Pursue the enquiry and see if there is anything to be realised or annihilated. See if there is any mind to be controlled. Even the effort is being made by the mind which does not exist.

8. Real Asana is “being established” in the Self-Reality or the Source. Sit in your Self. Where can the Self go and sit? Everything sits in the Self. Find out the source of the “I” and sit there. Don’t have the idea that the Self cannot be realised without the help of Asanas etc. They are not at all necessary. The chief thing is to enquire and reach the source of the ego. The details such as posture etc. may distract the mind towards them or to the body.

9. You may read whichever book you like. Self (*Atma*) is the real book. You can look into it whenever you like. Nobody can take it away. It is always at hand to be read. Hold on to your Self in your spare time also and then you can read any book.

10. Ask yourself “to whom do these doubts, fears and worries occur?” and they will vanish. Cease to pay attention

to them. Pay attention to the Self within. Fears etc. can only arise when there are two, or when anybody else exists apart from, or separate from, or outside you. If you turn, the mind inward towards the Self, fears etc. will disappear. If you try to remove a doubt or fear, another doubt or fear will arise. There will be no end of it. The best method to annihilate them is to ask “To whom do they occur?” and they will disappear. Destroying a tree by plucking its leaves one by one is impossible – other leaves will grow by ‘the time you pluck a few. Remove the root of the tree – the ego – and the whole tree with its leaves and branches will be destroyed. Prevention is better than cure.

Q. 10 a. Should I look for the source within the body?

A. 10 a. The ego arises within the body. Hence in the first instance you may look within the body for its source. When you reach the source there will be no inside or outside, because the source of the Self is all-pervading. After realisation everything will be inside the Self.

Q. 10. b. Is the source on the right side of the middle line of the chest?

A. 10. b. The Heart is defined as the place from which the ‘I thought’ arises. Heart means the Centre (of consciousness). It cannot be identified with any part of the body.

11. Keep the mind quiet. That is enough. Sitting in the Hall will help you. The purpose of effort is to get rid of all efforts. The force will be clearly felt when the stillness is achieved. Spiritual vibrations exist everywhere and they will manifest when the mind is stilled.

12. Look at your Self or *Atma*, rather than anywhere else. The eyes may be kept open or closed. It is immaterial. There is only one I, whether you spell it ‘I’ or ‘eye’. There is no point in opening or closing the eye. Attention must be focused on the inner ‘I’. You are not an eye that can be opened or closed. You may close or open the eyes according to your liking or inclination. It is immaterial, and not important. You will cease to think of the world when you think of the Self.

If you are in a room and close your eyes and do not look out, it is immaterial whether you close the windows or keep them open. (The body is the room, the eyes are the window.)

Looking at *Ajna-chakra* etc. is not necessary in this method. It may help in keeping the mind from going out towards external objects. Concentrate on the Self without which there are no chakras. They do not exist without you. You are all of them. All centres (chakras) are in the Heart. The Heart is not the *Anahata-chakra*, which is in the spinal cord. Heart is “I”.

13. First find out whether the ego exists, who is depressed by these thoughts. Find out how you got the idea of the body. Solve this problem for your ego, then see if anything remains to be solved.

## 14. Easy Yet Difficult\*

My contact with him began in 1930. It was by Divine Providence, not by my planning, that I was able to spend a continuous period of three years at Sri Ramanasramam. It was a great blessing. I was a science graduate. I had learned about the atomic structure of the universe and how matter finally resolves into energy and the mind also is a form of energy. So the entire world of mind and matter, when traced to its source, is one uniform Energy, or God, or whatever you choose to call it.

This was my attitude of mind when I first went to Sri Ramanasramam. Bhagavan was then translating his ‘*Ulladu Narpadu*’ (Forty Verses) into Telugu at the request of Yogi Ramiah. After finishing it he threw the book to me and said, “You are an Andhra; see if there are any mistakes of grammar in it.” This was an act of grace, for it was that translation

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\* G.L.N., *The Mountain Path*, January 1966.

which was responsible for turning my mind inwards and setting it on the right path.

The essence of what Bhagavan said to me in my talks with him was: “You say that on final analysis all that I see or think or do is one; but that really comprises two notions – the all that is seen and the I that does the seeing, thinking and doing, and says ‘I’. Which of these two is the more real, true and important? Obviously, the seer, since the seen is dependent on it. So, turn your attention to the seer who is the source of your ‘I’ and realise that. This is the real task. Up to now you have been studying the object, not the subject; now find out for what reality this word ‘I’ stands. Find the entity which is the source of the expression ‘I’. That is the Self, the Self of all selves.”

This direct, simple teaching was like a tonic to me. It swept away the unrest and confusion that till then had haunted my mind. It is, of course, the essence of ‘*Ulladu Narpadu*’ and the central theme of all Bhagavan’s writings. The simplicity of it made me burst out: “Then Bhagavan, Self-realisation is very easy, just as you say in the poem ‘*Atma Vidya*’!”

Bhagavan smiled and said, “Yes, yes, it seems so at first, but there is difficulty too. You have to overcome your present false values and wrong identification. Therefore, the quest requires concentrated effort and steadfast abidance in the Source when this is reached.”

However, even while warning me, he also added words of solace: “But don’t let that deter you. The rise of the urge to seek for the ‘I’ is itself an act of Divine Grace. Once this urge gets hold of you, you are in its clutches. The grip of Divine Grace never relaxes and finally devours you, just as the prey in a tiger’s jaws is never allowed to escape.”

## 15. The Essence of Ramana Maharshi's Teaching\*

“The Divine Master Bhagavan Sri Ramana ministered to countless devotees in countless ways. One finds in his teachings an immense range and variety suited to the level of the seeker. But one also finds that ultimately he leads every seeker to the crucial question ‘Who am I’?

Sri Bhagavan’s repeated emphasis on Self Enquiry and his lucid explanations of it drive home the point that it not merely represents a most direct path but is the real aim or goal implied in all spiritual effort. If we are given an unfailing means of finding or discovering the Truth, is it not the fruition of having met or having been influenced by as great a master as Bhagavan? To aid us in the task we have not only the teachings of Bhagavan as recorded in his conversations with devotees but his own words as well, in his own original works. An earnest seeker will find all help to make his effort fruitful.

The devotee queried by Bhagavan as to ‘who’ he was, may think for a while and reply he was either the body or the sense-organs or the mind. To this Sri Bhagavan would say: “In the world of phenomena you call certain things yours. These organs etc., are 1 ‘yours’ on the same analogy. You are in the position of an owner and since the owner is always different from what he owns; these are not ‘you’. In sleep you did exist but not the body or organs or mind.” This turns the seeker inward. He realises that he has merely assumed himself to be various things which he has never been and is not – the body, the sense-organs or the mind.

To know intellectually that the body or the mind can be transcended is preliminary knowledge that one is something beyond these. That is described as Knowledge or *Kutastha* or Brahman by the Upanishads. But to have concepts of the

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\* Sadhu Natanananda, *The Mountain Path*, April 1972.

Supreme Truth is not enough and often muddling, for how can the mind gauge what transcends it?

Taking the body etc. as the Self is due to delusion or ignorance whose origin is timeless. This ignorance is to a man spiritually what blindness is physically. A man who is born blind could not walk freely nor much less run like others even if his sight were to be restored instantaneously. The force of habit is so strong that it cannot be overcome quite suddenly. Practice is necessary. Similarly, one cannot dwell in the Self just on knowing one is the Self. Long sadhana is needed. The sadhana of enquiry is subtler and cannot be taken as a routine like bhajan, *parayana*, *archana*, *japa* or *dhyana*. It also implies continuous vigilance. Even a moment of inattention means slipping into the state of ignorance.

The aim is to transform oneself completely so that ultimately Self-awareness is as natural as body consciousness at the beginning. The following from Sri Bhagavan explains it clearly:

“...When, by continued effort, the conviction ‘I am that Guhesa’ (Lord of the Heart Cave) becomes as firm as the sense of ‘I’ in your body and you become that Lord, nescience of the form ‘I am the perishable body’ will disappear like darkness at sunrise.”

– *Supplement to the Forty Verses*, 20

*Dhyana*, *samadhi*, *nishta* etc. appear to represent different stages but all have the common aim of not swerving from Self-consciousness. Sri Bhagavan has explained clearly that not forgetting oneself or one’s real nature is the aim of all *tapas*. The sadhana of enquiry does not need any special equipment as a special spot or fixed time or room etc. The *Vivekachudamani* of Sankara, *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and other works stress the idea of not swerving from the Self. *Thayumanavar* has a beautiful verse on this: “Can this disease of *samsara* go by merely hearing (of the Self), contemplation or clarity of conviction? This falsehood of birth and death will vanish only for him who plunges into *nishta* with vigour.”



*Nishta* therefore means not to swerve from abidance in the Self. It is not sitting in a fixed place for a fixed time and things like that. When one develops the conviction that one is not the body or sense-organs or mind and is clear about being the Self, one should make the best of it, be alert and not get trapped in the doings of the phenomenal world. This is the fruition of ‘Who am I?’ enquiry: Never forget the Self which ever remains full and undivided!

## 16. Sri Bhagavan’s Grace\*

My father was an earnest devotee of Bhagavan. Whenever he happened to be at Tiruvannamalai on an official visit he never missed going to see Bhagavan. At that time Bhagavan was residing at Virupaksha Cave. My father would sometimes take me with him. I think I was seven years old when I saw Bhagavan for the first time. But it was much later that I came to stay close to Ramanasramam. Thus, I got many opportunities to meet and talk to Bhagavan.

Once, I asked Bhagavan what I should do to be on the spiritual path. He said, “Do what you want to do but keep doing it; don’t remain doing nothing. Repeat the name or think deeply or seek the source of your “I” consciousness, do *Atma Vichara* but keep working on yourself. This is very important.”

One instance of his grace to his devotees is his recommendation of two songs from *Tiruppugazh* to help them get their daughters married. The devotees of Bhagavan believed firmly that it was enough to sing the two songs from *Tiruppugazh* before Bhagavan to have the marriage arranged in the best way possible. There is another song in *Tiruppugazh* in which God is invited to come to the house as a newborn child. When anyone approached Bhagavan praying for a child he would tell him or her to sing that song.

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\* Gouriammal, *Ramana Smriti*, 1980.

I stayed at Ramana Nagar, where my house was situated, for eight years. Those were the most memorable and fruitful years of my life. How sweet they were and how many miracles happened before my very eyes! Once, Dr. Sreenivasa Rao was telling Bhagavan how good it would be for him to eat more pineapples, when somebody entered the hall with a heap of pineapples on a tray. On another occasion, Bhagavan was mentioning one Gajanana Sharma who used to stay with him some years earlier and enquired about his present whereabouts and doings. At that very moment the Postmaster entered the hall and in the mail, there was a letter from Gajanana Sharma with photos and details about his life, Ashram, and disciples. Bhagavan said, “Look at this, how wonderful! I was telling about him just now and here it all comes.”

On another day, a well-meaning but ignorant devotee insisted that Bhagavan should take the glass of orange juice that he had brought. Bhagavan was annoyed at being treated partially and said, “If you give anything to me without giving it to all, it will be like poison to me.” When the devotee said that next time all would be given orange juice, Bhagavan said, “What is the use of giving because I tell you? You should know by this time that they are all myself and what you give them you are giving me.” Bhagavan disapproved of any difference made between him and others.

Once a snake bit my sister’s five-year old son and in desperation she brought the child to Bhagavan. The doctor had given up hope and the boy was perspiring profusely and was in great pain. The child was already stiff with glazed eyes and was breathing heavily. The mother of the child was weeping all the way and carried him to Bhagavan. When Bhagavan saw her he said, “Don’t weep, don’t weep. It is nothing.” He passed his hand over the child and within a few minutes the boy recovered his senses and sat up. They sat in the hall for some time but as it was late in the evening the mother was told to take the child home. As she was leaving, she saw a Muslim devotee on the porch in front of Bhagavan’s Hall, murmuring his prayers.

By profession he was a snake charmer and a snakebite healer. When he saw them he said, “The boy was dying of snakebite, but since you were going to see Bhagavan I kept quiet. Now the child is safe, but the poison is still in his body and I had better chant some charms to get it out.” He chanted some prayers and then asked them to go. Bhagavan had saved the child but wanted the snake charmer to take the credit.

### **17. A Chakra at Sri Ramanasramam\***



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\* Krishna Bhikshu, *The Mountain Path*, April 1965.

In the sanctum sanctorum of the Matrubhuteswara Temple at Sri Ramanasramam, established by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, in a small niche in the western wall, stands an object of worship two feet square and proportionately high, cut out of a single piece of granite and resting on a base of gold plate on which is etched a particular symbolical geometric figure. This object has been worshipped ever since its installation by Sri Bhagavan in 1949, the year before he laid down the body.

In technical terminology it is a *Sri Chakra Meru* standing on a *Sri Chakra Bhu-prasthara yantra*. It may seem incongruous to some that Bhagavan who all his life taught the philosophy and path of Advaita or Identity should at the same time inaugurate this other mode of worship or sadhana which is to all appearance far removed from it. But since he did so it behoves us to try to understand why, and for that we must investigate the significance of the *Sri Chakra Meru* and *Sri Chakra yantra* and of the sadhana based on them. While doing so it is well to remember that they are a symbolism and a sadhana that go right back to Vedic times and are said to have been originally instituted by the Lord Himself.

The object of all sadhana taught and practised at Sri Ramanasramam is only to realise the ever-existing identity between the worshipper or individual self and the Worshipped or Supreme Self. Advaita itself is based on the Vedic text: *Sarvam khaluidam Brahma*, “All this is Brahman”. To realise this is, the purpose of any *Advaitic upasana* or teaching. The teaching is succinctly set forth in another verse: “*Isavasyam idam sarvam, yatkincha jagatyam jagat*”, meaning whatever lives and moves in this phenomenal world is to be clad in the luminosity of the Lord. To put it more simply, we have to realise as a result of sadhana (and not merely know theoretically) that everything, visible and invisible, is a manifestation of the Supreme Brahman. This is technically termed *Brahma-atma-aikyam* siddhi: realisation that the Brahman or Supreme Self is the same as the *Atma* or individual Self. The Supreme Being is called the Brahmanda or ‘egg of Brahma’ and the

composite personality of the individual, the *pindanda* or ‘egg of flesh’. The embryonic form of the individual Self or the basic form out of which it is evolved is called the ‘*andanda*’, or ‘egg of life’. From the *pindanda* the successful sadhaka rises to the *Brahmanda* or limitless Beyond. Successful sadhana results in a blissful (*ananda*) conscious (*chinmaya*) existence (*sat*). In that state there are neither ‘I’ nor ‘others’ neither self nor phenomena, but only the all-embracing *Satchitananda*, Being-Consciousness-Bliss. However, even this, the texts say, is only the mode of Brahman called *Saguna* or ‘Conditioned’. Beyond it is *Nirguna* Brahman or ‘Conditionless Brahman’ to which no words or attributes can reach.

The *Sri Chakra Meru* type of sadhana instituted by Bhagavan at his Ashram aims at this same ultimate objective through concentration on a symbol called the Meru. The method is known as tantra or tantrism, being based on the ancient tantric texts. These are coeval with the Vedas. The sadhana based on them is worship of the power aspect of Brahman which is called Tripurasundari, the same as the *Saguna Brahman* we referred to above. Of course, it must not be supposed that *Saguna Brahman* is anything different from the ultimate *Nirguna Brahman*; it is only another aspect of it.

Tantric sadhana proceeds by worship of a form, or perhaps concentration on a form might be a more apt description. This is usually a geometrical figure called a yantra although, as will be explained later, it may also be an icon. The sadhana involves the utterance of mantras and the use of the requisite *dravyas* or supports at the right moment and in the right manner. It can only be validly performed by one who has been initiated into it by a guru. The tantras declare that the *devata* or god worshipped, the yantra or symbol used, the mantra or words uttered and the mantri or worshipper are all one and the same; and therefore, the purpose of this worship is to rise from the state of creature to the state of Creator.

Probing into the meaning of this mode of sadhana, we find that it is a method of concretising concepts in a material

form and, by working through the material form, rising above it to the level of concept and then above even that to the finer and subtler level of its Source. The material form through which one works may be a *prathika* or icon or a *prathima* or geometrical symbol. This last is known as a yantra. Tantrikas use both types. Both are described in detail in the agamas or tantric texts; and it is important that they should be exactly as laid down, because there is no fancy or imagination in the prescription but precise symbolism. The object of this article is not to describe this symbolism at length but to explain the basic concept underlying tantric worship.

How do we represent the entire cosmos with its phenomenal manifestations in a geometrical figure? Its causal or embryonic state, the '*andanda*' referred to above, is represented by a minute circle called the *bindhu*, round which the yantra is built. This point or minute circle represents the unevolved essence or germ of being, the virtual *Satchitananda* known in the individual as the *antaryami*. To counterbalance it an infinitely large circle represents the fully evolved and perfected manifestation or actualised perfection. This is the *Brahmanda*, and since it has no limitation the limits of manifestation are represented by squares within it.

Out of the *bindhu* or causal state of the individual, which is the causal body or *karana sarira* of the cosmos, are manifested *kala* and *nada*, light and sound, which appear on a formal plane as form and name. That is on the level of formal manifestation, but prior to that, on the causal plane, first arise desire and action, *ichcha* and *kriya*. These are the first two expressions of the Prime Power or Sakti. Thus the whole process of manifestation is dependent on and governed by the Sakti which is (1) Chit or Consciousness, (2) *Ichcha*, wish or desire, (3) *Kriya* or action. *Kriya* is the combined result of the first two and is represented as the apex of the triangle of which they form the base. Although one says 'base' and 'apex' the triangle is actually inverted, with its apex pointing downwards, since it represents the descent of the Divine into

the manifested world. The sadhaka is represented by another triangle with its apex pointing upwards. The two triangles interpenetrate and in the heart of them is the *bindhu*. The *ichcha* of the individual leads him to action and from the two of them combined arises consciousness, aspiring upwards. The descent of the Divine and the ascent of the aspirant are thus interlocked, and this is the simplest form of the yantra or symbol. Between the *bindhu* and the Beyond the power of the Maha Tripurasundari or Supreme Sakti has now built for herself a *pindanda* represented by the six-pointed star, and out of this emerge the microcosm or individual and the macrocosm or cosmos. This is also called the first pura, body or abode, in which the *Mulasakti* or Original Sakti abides.

All the geometrical figures used in the chakra are variants of circles and triangles. A *bindhu* surrounded by a triangle in a circle can represent the entire creation; but all the manifestations of power have to figure in the completed yantra. According to tantric teaching the *Mulasakti* or Original Sakti manifests as three different saktis at each node of the triangle. These are Sri Maha Saraswati, Sri Maha Lakshmi and Sri Maha Kali, the three primary forms of the Mother. They are the first deities to be worshipped by every manifestation of form and name in the universe.

Each of them has various aspects which are manifested in the larger triangles. The powers of the Sakti are legion. Cosmically, each larger triangle represents a wider and grosser manifestation. The tantric texts give the names of the presiding deities at each of the nodes of each of these triangles. This diagram of manifestation is surrounded by two concentric circles, of which the inner represents the centrifugal forces and the outer the centripetal. The various types of forces are represented by the petals of a lotus. Outside the circles there is still grosser manifestation represented by squares which surround the pura or abode of the Devi. Every type of matter, metal, tree and living creature, is given a place in these



ramparts. The deities which preside over each rampart are mentioned and have to be worshipped by the aspirant. It is said that the Sri Puri or place in which the Mother manifests herself is surrounded by twenty-five ramparts of different materials and that beyond these is the unmanifest power of the Sakti.

For the individual the order is reversed. What is in seed form in the first upright triangle has to be expanded by sadhana into the larger triangles which represent wider powers latent in him. Ultimately, he has to overleap the ramparts and merge in the all-pervading Unmanifest. I have purposely not given the details of the chakras mentioned in the texts, since Tantrism is a secret tradition not to be revealed in its operative details except to those who are initiated into it. It is enough to say that each figure represents some *tattva* in the cosmic creation which is the second pura or abode of the Mother. And the Beyond, i.e. the *Brahmanda* of the cosmos, is the third pura.

Tantrism teaches that in worshipping the deities at each point of the diagram one acquires their Grace and develops the power they represent. Thus, what begins as the mere worship of an outer form becomes a *samskara* on the mental plane, and these *samskaras* can actualise powers in the individual which were hitherto merely virtual or potential. Finally, they lead the individual back to the amplitude of power, consciousness and bliss which is the essential nature of the Divine Mother.

Tantrics believe in the manifestation of the Mother in form and name, which means that for them creation is a fact and not just an illusion, as it is for the pure *Advaitin*. The *Advaitin* works for the elimination of ignorance or illusion, whereas the tantric works for the development of cosmic power and consciousness. The ultimate goal of both is the same, that is identity with *Saguna Brahman* and further eventual transition into the *Nirguna* beyond.

Tantrism teaches that there are a number of worlds on different planes, controlled by different powers of the Divine



Mother. The ultimate result of sadhana is identification with the formless and nameless Power above them all that is Maha Tripurasundari, the Supreme Sakti.

Now to return to the specific case of Sri Ramanasramam. The yantra called *Sri Chakra Bhuprastara* is etched on a gold plate and forms the base of the Meru worshipped there. To the normal *Sri Chakra* form thus etched Bhagavan added some *bija aksharas* of the mantra of Kumara or Subramanya.

The Meru *prasthara* is the *Sri Chakra* in conical form, its apex representing the highest point of realisation attainable to the aspirant as a result of his sadhana. The mind becomes one-pointed and merges into the indescribable Beyond that is the Mother. Through this chakra the deities or devas are to be worshipped. It is taught that the universe is in three stages, the causal, subtle and gross. For the Tantric all this has to be symbolised, whereas for the *Advaitin* it is not necessary. The ultimate result aimed at is the same for both.

That is why Sri Bhagavan, who prescribed Self-enquiry for those who could follow it, also instituted this type of temple worship for those who are helped by it. Thus the beneficent power which he brought on earth is induced into the *Sri Chakra* sanctified by his touch. Some of his devotees believe that when he felt that the time was approaching for him to give up the body he instituted this as a means of canalising and continuing the Grace he had brought to them. He inducted his Divine Power into the *Sri Chakra* and *Meru Chakra* so that those drawn to the more elaborate path might continue to receive his Grace even after the disappearance of his body as well as those who practised Self-enquiry. He was present at the installation and took a great interest in the *pratishtapana*, personally adding some details to the forms of the Chakra and supervising the entire construction of the temple. He inspected every stone of the temple carefully during its construction and told the workmen to eliminate every defect, and at every stage he was the final authority both on form and on the ritual to be adopted and the deities to be worshipped. It

is through his Grace that the Matrubhuteswara Temple is now *Rishi-pratishtapita*, (installed by the rishi) radiating his Light, which is the Light of the Mother. Its very name signifies that it is Iswara (God) who has become the Mother, pointing to the identity between Iswara and Mother or between Siva and Sakti. Thus, the advaitic doctrine of identity is not negated by this act of Bhagavan's but on the contrary reinforced so as to be available for those who require a more ritualistic path.

## 18. Bhagavan Sri Ramana as I Knew Him\*

**S**ri Ramana was my Divine Father. At my first 'Darshan' in the summer of 1933, Sri Ramana reclining on the sofa in the old hall looked the very picture of my father in Heaven. So, I always approached him as a child, would draw near to his father, and he ever responded as an indulgent parent. That was the secret of my prattle in his presence and of the liberties I took with him, as well as of the lenience and favour he lavished upon me. He used to talk to me at length and make the kindest personal inquiries. He often asked me to interpret him and inspired me to do many literary jobs. He gave me the rare privilege of working with him in the kitchen though I was an ignoramus in culinary service. He made me understand the truth of Christ's saying, "I and my Father are one". Indeed, he taught me to realise finally that Sri Ramana was all the best human relationships rolled into One.

Sri Ramana once defined Sat Guru as one who at mere sight would pluck away all the unrest and misery of his disciple and plunge him in a pool of Peace and Bliss. Sri Ramana was himself the best example of such a Sat Guru. It was the universal experience of devotees and visitors that in his presence they forgot all their doubts and cares and felt

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\* G.V. Subbaramayya, M.A. (Hons.), V.R. College, Nellore), *The Call Divine*, January 1955.

the Peace that passeth understanding. He never gave formal initiation to any disciple, and yet the world hailed him as Sat-Guru. He was also a '*Mouna-Guru*' (Silent Master) like Lord Dakshinamurti. His normal silence was even more potent than his oral utterance. His mere presence was indeed the greatest boon and blessing to us all. Nay more; the very remembrance of Sri Ramana like the thought of holy Arunachala was and is itself sufficient to lead one to '*Mukti*' (Salvation).

Sri Ramana was a true *Jnani*. Having realised the Self in his boyhood, he ever remained the same. He saw and knew nothing other than the Self. His approach to life's problems was direct and original. He spoke with authority and carried conviction because he spoke what he knew, and he knew what he spoke. According to Sri Ramana, the sign of a true *Jnani* is his equal treatment of all beings. Sri Ramana illustrated it in his own conduct. His outlook was universal. There was nothing foreign in his eye. He sympathized fully with all beings. If anything he was partial to children and to the so-called sub-humans. He would never neglect to give a child, a bird, a squirrel, his smile and caress. He always referred to them by the personal pronoun 'he' 'she' etc., and never by the contemptuous 'it'. Naturally they responded in equal measure. Every child called him 'Tatta' (Grandpa) and played with him; peacocks danced before him; cows licked him; squirrels crawled on His body. While stoically indifferent to the aches and ailments of his own body, he was all sympathy and tenderness for the troubles and sufferings of others.

As he had become one with the Supreme Self that is the source of Power, all '*Siddhis*' (Powers) were at his beck and call. So many miracles were happening every day, unnoticed, in his presence. One constant miracle may be here stated. Whenever he casually mentioned somebody's name, that person would presently enter or would be on the way to his presence. But Sri Ramana would make light of such happenings. Once a paralytic was carried into His presence, and, lo and behold! he got up and walked. Sri Ramana himself

seemed to share the wonder of those present. Indeed, he used to warn us against being lured and diverted by the ‘Siddhis’ from our ‘Sadhana’ (practice) for true knowledge. He once told me “A *Jnani* has no will of his own. It is enough that a matter is brought to His notice. A Divine automatic action starts at once and proceeds to do the needful.” Being a man of Self-Realisation Sri Ramana taught us the ‘know-how’ of mind-control, a path to Self-Knowledge.

When a thought occurs to you, do not pursue it, but question yourself: “To whom does the thought occur?” “To myself”, “Who am I?”. At once, the thought vanishes, and the mind becomes still. Repeat this process until it becomes a habit. When the mind or ego is thus destroyed, the self-manifests itself.

That is the gist of Sri Ramana’s precept, and his life’s purpose was to exemplify the state of Self-Realisation in His own practice. Like the beacon-fire of Arunachala, of Ramana was the blazing light of Spirituality that illumined all souls who turned to him.

Sri Ramana once remarked that only a true *Jnani* could be a perfect Karma-Yogi. He was himself the best illustration of that truth. Without a will or initiative of his own, he did to perfection whatever came to his hand. No work was too low or too high for him. Whatever it was, he concentrated upon it and attended to every minute detail of doing it. He was indeed an artist of life. To merely watch his manner of living was the best lesson in life’s wisdom. He was punctual and punctilious in carrying out the daily routine. He scrupulously observed cleanliness. There was supernal grace and elegance about everything he did. One instance will suffice. Sri Ramana used to take meals squatting along with others. He would first ascertain whether every item has been served to all. Then he would give a sign to begin, and only thereafter he would himself start eating. He would mix all items with rice into one mass and eat it unmindful of its taste. He would not waste a single particle but leave the plantain leaf just as clean as it was

in the beginning. He would himself carry the leaf and throw it out just like the rest. So, his every action was an object-lesson to all in cleanliness, neatness, and propriety. Wearing only a codpiece, he was simplicity itself. And yet there was an aura of beauty and elegance about his person and posture. Rooted in the Transcendental State, he still was keenly observant of everything going on around him. He moved equally with all. His behaviour was the most natural, spontaneous, and free from formality. He had absolutely no privacy but was easily accessible to all people at all hours. His life was like an open book.

Sri Ramana possessed literary and artistic genius of the highest order. All his works were either answers to questions or written in response to the prayer of some devotee or other. His ‘Five Hymns to Arunachala’, besides being profoundly philosophical, are gems of lyrical beauty and devotional fervour. His “Wedding-garland of Letters” is the most moving lyric addressed to Arunachala and is constantly sung by all devotees. His ‘*Upadesa Saram*’ and ‘*Ulladu Narpadu*’ not only contain the quintessence of philosophical wisdom but are masterpieces of poetic rhythm and succinct style. His command over Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayalam was equal to his proficiency in Tamil, his mother-tongue. It was the marvellous classic beauty of Sri Ramana’s Sanskrit and Telugu compositions that first drew this writer to his feet. He was an artist to the tips of his conical fingers. His script itself is a marvel of perfect form and neat execution. Sri Ramana was a superb actor. Whenever he narrated a story or anecdote or recited a poem, he showed a wonderful dramatic genius. He completely identified himself with the character in the situation.

His face, voice and gestures made the scene live before you. It was a most affecting, unforgettable experience to all listeners.

Sri Ramana’s life was a ‘*Leela*’ (sport) of Divine Grace. A poet aptly described him as the incarnation of Grace. Sri

Ramana once declared that Grace was not merely an attribute of *Jnani* but was the synonym for Real Self. So, the Supreme Self that is Grace took shape as Sri Ramana and blessed us all for threescore years and ten. The Self is immortal and eternal. And Sri Ramana as the Self of our self is ever with us and in us, showering Grace upon us and calling us to His Presence. May we heed the call and dissolve our little ego into that ‘Nectareous Ocean of Grace’ that is Sri Ramana.

## 19. Arunachala Aksharamanamalai\*

It is said that, to reveal the meaning of the *Tiruvacakam*, the noble Sri Manickavachakar simply pointed to the divine Hall [of Chidambaram], before himself merging as one with it and disappearing.<sup>†</sup> This is something that should give us much food for thought. If one were to have asked Bhagavan Sri Ramana, who gave us in grace *Aksharamanamalai*, what its meaning was, there is no doubt that he too would have remained silent, pointing to Arunachala, and revealing that its meaning was Arunachala itself.

When we consider the story of Bhagavan Sri Ramana’s life, it is seen to be a tale of divine grace, in which ‘the flashing forth of Arunachala’ (*Arunachala sphurana*) appeared in him as his very nature ‘from the innocence of youth,’ entirely swallowed up his body, possessions, his very soul and caused him to exist as one with its very own Self.

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\* Introduction to Muruganar’s Commentary by Sadhu Natanananda (1952) translated by Robert Butler (2015).

† According to his biography Manickavachakar, when asked the meaning of the *Tiruvācakam*, simply pointed at the Golden Hall of Chidambaram, his body vanishing and dissolving into light as he did so. See *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam*, *Maṇ sumanta paṭalam*, v. 3105, and *Tiruvātavūr Aṭikaḷ Purāṇam*, vv 535-538.

That there was in him at first some trace of dualistic awareness is demonstrated in his words, ‘I have left in search of my Father according to his command.’\* However, as soon as he laid eyes on Arunachala, he attained the transcendental state in which he remained as the Self alone, as exemplified in the words, ‘When I sought in my mind who the seer was, I perceived Him standing there with no trace of the seer,’† and remained absorbed for a long period of time in his natural state, *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*, as the very form of Arunachala (unalloyed, pure being), ‘which allows nothing to manifest, other than its own nature as the Self.’‡ Later, he gained the realisation that, although grace and the world are not different, the Self manifests in two different ways, and thus was able to attain the state of *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*, the experience of consciousness free of divisions, in which, even on the worldly level, he still perceived everything, without distortion, through the eye of grace. It was at this juncture that this first work appeared, as the expression of that experience.

Already his awareness, his energy, his mind, his voice, everything had been swallowed up by Arunachala on his arrival there, even as ‘the day consumes that darkness of night,’ and the name ‘Arunachala, Arunachala!’ flashed forth from Arunachala’s gracious presence which shines as pure being. What meaning then could there be to those ‘flashings forth,’ other than that Arunachala itself, the fullness of the Real? Further, the qualities displayed in the strength of Bhagavan’s austerities, his attainment of the Supreme, are evidenced in such utterances as, ‘Entering my home, you dragged me from it and made me dwell as a prisoner in the cave of your Heart’; ‘Removing my dark delusion, you held me in thrall

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\* The words in quotes are taken from the note that Bhagavan left behind when he left his home in Madurai to go to Arunachala.

† *Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam*, v. 2, l. 1.

‡ *Tayumānavar*, hymn 14, *Ākāra puvaṇam – Citampara rakaciyam*, v. 22, l. 1.

to your Reality with the magic collyrium of your grace’; ‘Enchanting me as if with magic powder, you revealed your Siva consciousness, plucking away my *jiva* consciousness;’ ‘Grasping me as the ghost (Brahman) which does not let go of me, so that my ghost nature (the ego) left me, you made of me a ghostly one;’ ‘What austerities have I performed, that you should take me as the target of your grace?’ If we examine such utterances carefully, we can see that his experience was not that of many of the other great sages. According to the expression, ‘If one worships Lord Siva, practising austerities over many eons of time, right understanding may dawn to some degree,’ such sages exerted themselves over long periods of time to gain spiritual maturity through the acquisition of grace gained only with great difficulty. Then, through their own efforts, coupled with the *sadguru*’s glance of grace, they understood the inner meaning of the *mahavakya* teachings, ‘Brahman am I,’ ‘He am I,’ and ‘Sivam am I.’ Finally having performed arduous austerities on paths such as ‘the way of the ant,’ ‘the way of the bird,’ and ‘the way of the monkey,’ [all of which require some form of effort on the part of the *sadhaka*],\* they attained the state of union which is the meaning of the word ‘art’ [in the *mahavakya* ‘Thou art That’]. Whilst this was so in their case, in the case of Sri Ramana, however, it can be said with certainty that even in his dreams he never thought about, desired or strived to attain anything, be it true knowledge, the attainment of liberation, teachings, or the grace of a guru, and that, rather than saying

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\* *pipīlika mārga* – the way of the ant signifies the slow progression of the *sadhaka* through the various stages on the spiritual path; *vihaṅga mārga* – the way of the bird signifies the direct path in which the *sadhaka* proceeds immediately to the practice of *jñāna yoga* and *markaṭa nyāya* – the way of the monkey signifies the path of devotion and faith in which the *sadhaka* clings tightly to the Lord in the face of all hardships, as a baby monkey clings to its mother as she swings from tree to tree. See also the commentary to v. 16 in Appendix 2.



‘he became’ Arunachala, it is more appropriate to say, ‘he was transformed’ into Arunachala. Moreover, when he exclaims in tones of praise and wonder, ‘Say to me, “Without knowing the truth of *Thou art that* thus much did you attain. This state that you have attained is the final truth,”’ it becomes clear that he is addressing Sri Arunachala, in the second person, as the one who granted him in grace the direct experience of Brahman that arose in him suddenly ‘in the way of the cat’ [which holds its kitten firmly by the neck\*]. Having had this new, unexpected and wondrous experience of coming to dwell simply as ‘That’, in which he was thus swallowed up by the vast effulgence of grace, he at that time took up the enquiry, ‘Who am I’, desiring to refine his understanding of, and become firmly established in, his nature and form, and it was this same enquiry that in later times he taught as *Atma vichara* to the followers who paid homage to him.

Thus the subject of this work is Arunachala, the unmoving reality whose nature is being-consciousness-bliss. It is the space of consciousness (*chidambaram*) which transcends word and thought. Who are those who are capable of perceiving the essence of that nature which is known only through divine silence (*mauna*)! The firm conclusion established by the experience of the great sages is, ‘[Who can speak of its greatness and to whom?] When That [Reality] comes about, they will be only That. That alone can speak [of its greatness].’† Therefore it is a certain fact that only those who possess the fitness for dwelling in that immovable state are the fit ones to communicate that state.

That great soul, Sri Muruganar, is one who, through the grace of his guru, is possessed of a great strength and ability

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\* In Bhagavan’s case there was no need for him to seek the Lord by any of the previously mentioned means. It was Arunachala who took hold of him and did not let go, as a cat grasps her kitten by the loose skin at the neck. This is called *mārjāla nyāya* – the way of the cat.

† *Tayumānavar*, Hymn 14, *Ākāra puvaṇam* – *Citampara rakaciyam*, v. 22, 1.4.

to take on and complete tasks that are extremely difficult to accomplish. Worshipping the feet of his guru through that grace itself, and relying upon the power of that grace, he has embarked upon the great, rare and good endeavour of discerning the recondite meaning of this work of grace, *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*. That one such as he has achieved a truly miraculous success in his endeavour, is not to be wondered at. No other excellence need be desired of this work, other than that it was composed by Muruganar with the grace of Sri Ramana as his eyes. However, there is one further point worth mentioning.

This commentary was composed at a time when Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi, the author of the source text, still inhabited his radiant, divine bodily form. Being in Bhagavan's divine presence, Muruganar was able to compose it having clearly ascertained the author's intended meaning for every single word of the text, so that there was not the slightest discrepancy between the text and its commentary. As with the commentaries on the *Prasthanatrayam* and many other commentaries on works imbued with grace, doubts assail the minds of those who study them in a number of places regarding the congruence of meaning between the text and the commentary. However, this commentary possesses the unique excellence in which the possibility has been entirely eradicated that it might appear to anyone, ever, that there was a lack of congruence between itself and the text.

Until today, this work, *Sri Aksharamanamalai*, has been considered an ordinary example of the genre of hymns of praise, worshipping Sri Arunachaleswarar in its own distinct fashion as the form of the Supreme, and, as such, has been used for regular recitation (*parayana*). But now, due to the brilliance of the learned Sri Muruganar's commentary, it shines out as a distinguished, authoritative treatise, and has endeared him to the hearts of all devotees. It is no exaggeration to say that this Commentary has made of him one who is rich in grace, who dwells with Sri Ramana, his guru and god.

It is certain that this commentary will be greeted with great delight by the wise and learned.

## 20. Ramana Reminiscences\*

I knew full well that Bhagavan gave no formal *upadesa* (initiation) but I kept on asking for it whenever an opportunity presented itself. Invariably Bhagavan used to reply, “Who is the Guru and who is the *sisya* (disciple)? They are not two. There is but One Reality. It is in you and It can neither be given nor taken. But you may read books for intellectual understanding.”

On March 12, 1934 after prayers at the Shrine of Matrubhuteswara I went to the old hall. Only the attendant Madhava Swami was with Bhagavan. When I made my usual request Bhagavan laid aside the newspaper he was reading and sat in padmasana, quite absorbed. I then recited a (general) hymn of praise to the Guru in Telugu and also *Aksharamanamalai* in Telugu (the hymn on Arunachala by Bhagavan). Bhagavan turned to Madhava Swami and said, “She has prayed to Arunachala.” This struck me as meaning that Arunachala will give the initiation and also that Bhagavan and Arunachala are not two. Bhagavan resumed his state of absorption and I had my persistent request for *upadesa*. But he continued to sit motionless. Finally, I begged of him, “Am I not a competent person to receive *upadesa*? Bhagavan should himself tell me about this. Even if Bhagavan confirms this how is it that I adopted him as my Guru immediately on hearing of him? Will it all be in vain?” (She was just told that a Rishi lived at the foot of the Hill). Immediately on my speaking thus I found a bright light emanating from Bhagavan’s holy face, and the effulgence filled the whole hall. I could not see Bhagavan’s body but only the brilliance.

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\* Madhaviammal, *The Silent Power*.

I shed tears in profusion. The whole incident could have lasted just two seconds! I prostrated to Bhagavan. There was a smile on his face but no movement otherwise. After a while Bhagavan turned to me as if to ask, “Are you rid of your mania?” Yes, I was. He then took a piece of paper, wrote a sloka (verse) on it and gave it to me saying, “You can make use of it in meditation.”

This is the sloka:

“I adore Guha the Dweller in the Cave of the Heart, the Son of the Protector of the Universe, the Pure Light of Awareness beyond thought, the Wielder of the weapon of *Jnana Sakti* and the Remover of the ignorance of blemishless devotees.”

And again he smiled graciously.

This was wonderful *upadesa* indeed by a Master rare to see. My Master taught me the great truth that there is only ONE. The proper Guru is one who shows what is. This was but a practical demonstration of the saying

“The Master’s face reveals Brahman. You attain Brahman through Grace.”

## 21. The Essential Teaching of the Maharshi\*

Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion. Indeed, it is by no means easy for any one not born a Hindu to become one, since it is not only a religion but a social structure into which a newcomer could not easily fit. The religion of a Hindu consists of two elements (and indeed, he has no word corresponding at all exactly to ‘religion’): a pattern of life and worship and a path to Beatitude.

Hinduism is also not an intolerant religion. By no means all follow a path to Beatitude, though many recognize that they ought to. Even for those who do, there are many paths

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\* Arthur Osborne, *The Mountain Path*, April 1972.

to choose from. One who follows a devotional path may, for instance, worship God in the form of Rama. If he does it will never occur to him to refuse recognition to those who worship God in the form of Krishna or try to convert them. Why then should he try to convert those who worship God in the form of Christ? If told that they or the Buddhists believe theirs to be the only valid path to Beatitude, he is likely to smile pityingly.

Mystics in any religion, that is those who know from experience, perceive that the experience is universal and beyond doctrine and usually find it easy to understand that it can be approached through other religions also. And Hindu doctrine is openly mystical. It declares plainly: "The unreal has no being, the Real no not-being."\* The whole Truth is in that sentence. The Real is not something that has been in the past or will be in the future; it does not depend on religion or doctrine; it cannot be made real, it just IS, now and eternally.

Since Ramakrishna Paramahansa a remarkable change has taken place in Hinduism. The gurus have separated the path to Beatitude from the Hindu pattern of life by giving initiation to non-Hindus. It was Swami Vivekananda who was most spectacular in introducing this change with Vedanta Societies in America; but it was not his innovation. Ramakrishna himself had a dream which he interpreted to mean that he would have many followers in the West. Sri Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna, whom all his disciples revered as 1 The Holy Mother had foreign disciples. She and all the other disciples approved of Vivekananda's action. Since then the saints and gurus have continued the practice. It culminated in Ramana Maharshi.

This development is of tremendous importance for it means that they can not merely appreciate the wisdom

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\* *Bhagavad Gita*, II, 16.

and beauty of it but find actual guidance on the path of Beatitude.

In his lifetime the Maharshi initiated his disciples silently, with no forms of ritual. We see the wisdom of this now, because the same silent initiation continues although he has shed the body. This is not just theory; there have been many cases of it.

The Maharshi's teaching too was independent of any specific religion. This does not mean that he deprecated ritual or religion. He appreciated them for those who are helped by them; but in our modern, materialistic, individualistic world there are many who are outside their pale or can find no guidance in them, and yet seek. It was for such that his guidance came. And it was not for one generation only.

His instruction was of the simplest: to seek Reality through the enquiry 'Who am I?'. However, this is not a mere mental enquiry. It is not philosophy or psychology. He indicated this by saying: "No answer that the mind gives can be right." It is rather clinging to one's actual sense of being, of I-am-ness, and experiencing that in full consciousness while suspending thought. One sign that it is not mental is that the Maharshi advised, while meditating in this way, to concentrate not on the head but the heart at the right side, the spiritual Heart. The ancient Hebrews knew of this: "The wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left."\* Not to think about the Heart but to experience with or in the Heart.

He taught the Unity of Being; but it is not a question of whether God exists apart from you but of whether you exist apart from God, as he showed in his *Forty Verses on Reality*, his great exposition of doctrine. "All religions postulate the three fundamentals – the world, the soul and God; but it is only the One Reality that manifests itself as these three. One can say, 'The three are really three' only so long as the ego

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\* Ecclesiastes, X, 2.

exists. Therefore, to inhere in one's own Being, where the 'I' or ego is dead, is the perfect state.”\*

But it is no use arguing about it; it has to be experienced: “It is due to illusion born of ignorance that men fail to recognize That which is always and for everybody the inherent Reality dwelling in its natural Heart-centre and to abide in it, and that instead they argue that it exists or does not exist, that it has form or has not form, or is non-dual or dual.”†

Doctrine must be transcended, because the only answer is experience and the ultimate experience is Identity: “Under whatever name and form one may worship the Absolute Reality, it is only a means for realising It without name and form. That alone is true Realisation wherein one knows oneself in relation to that Reality, attains peace and realises one's identity with It.”‡

There are many, however, whom this path of direct inner quest does not suit. They are drawn to a more devotional way. For them too the Maharshi provided guidance. He often said: “There are two ways: ask yourself ‘Who am I?’ or submit.” And indeed, if the mind cannot realise its own nothingness and universality, the only thing is for it to submit to the Universal. If it does it will eventually be absorbed (“I came to devour Thee, but Thou hast devoured me; now there is peace, Arunachala!”§), so the two paths lead to the same goal. For those who are drawn to the more emotional approach the Maharshi wrote the *Marital Garland of Letters to Arunachala*, the supreme mystical love poem, beginning: “Thou dost root out the ego of those who meditate on Thee in the Heart, O Arunachala!”¶

But if the ego is eradicated no void remains; pure Being takes its place: “Hast Thou not bartered cunningly Thyself for

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\* *Forty Verses on Reality*, v. 2.

† *ibid.*, v. 34.

‡ *ibid.*, v. 8.

§ *Marital Garland of Letters*, v. 28.

¶ *ibid.*, v. 1.

me? O, Thou art death to me, Arunachala!”\* What is destroyed is only the illusion of duality, of two separate beings: “Unite with me to destroy Thee and me and bless me with the state of ever-vibrant joy, O Arunachala!”† And the mind wonders at the Grace of it: “Thou art the Primal Being, whereas I count not in this or the other world. What didst Thou thus gain by my worthless self, O Arunachala?”‡

The two paths are not incompatible. Many do in fact combine them. Nevertheless, a person is apt to be drawn more to one or the other. Therefore, guidance was provided on both.

The Maharshi often said, “The Guru is One.” Whatever Guru one may follow it is only a manifestation of the Inner Guru, the Christ in you, and his function is to lead you back to the Source. Nevertheless, until the heart is purified various impulses may masquerade as the inner Guru and it is safer (and indeed usually necessary) to have an outer Guru. In this spirituality dark age an enlightened Guru is not easy to find. Therefore, the silent initiation was instituted, for Providence always meets the needs of its children. Those who turn to the Maharshi for help will not be left without guidance. Sri Bhagavan’s detailed explanations of Self-enquiry do not mean that his emphasis on this method was absolute or dogmatic. Sri Kunju Swami shows how all methods were given their due place by Sri Bhagavan, citing concrete instances.

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\* *ibid.*, v. 62.

† *ibid.*, v. 56.

‡ *ibid.*, v. 93.



## **22. Bhagavan Sri Ramana as I Knew Him\***

The title of this article may not be quite appropriate, for those who “knew” Sri Bhagavan Ramana – know Him forever. This is because, even a single encounter with the Great Rishi on our life’s path is an event which can never be forgotten or dimmed in our consciousness by the passage of time. For some of us, it meant a complete change in the course of our present and future lives, and this could never have happened otherwise. The scope of the subject is far too broad to be described in detail within the frame of such a short article and therefore I am compelled to condense it as much as possible.

The first time I met him, I had come directly from the cart which had brought me from Tiruvannamalai railway station. Before visiting the Ashram, I had been conversant with Sri Maharshi’s teachings for some four years and the many photographs had made his features quite familiar to me. So that, when I was ushered into the dimly lit dining hall, I was able to recognize him immediately, although, at that time his figure was much more meagre than in the pictures I had seen. He was sitting close to a wall eating his evening meal. I bowed in greeting, and with an incomparable expression of kindness on his face, he asked me where the other devotee was who had come with me. I wondered at his very sharp memory, because my letter advising of my proposed visit, had been written many months before. My friend’s absence was explained, as he had not been in a position to come. Then Sri Bhagavan ordered that supper be brought to me.

It was not a matter of deliberation, but an intuitive flash, when I became conscious that at last I had found what I had been seeking all my life. Immediately I became absorbed into the presence of the Master. At first I was worried about his precarious physical state; but my grief quickly became

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\* Mouni Sadhu (Australia), *The Call Divine*, January 1955.

dissolved in his spiritual radiation. The outer appearance soon merged into that mysterious inner link with him, which has remained unbroken from that moment up to the present time. While I was at his feet I learned to stop the thought-current in my mind, a thing which formerly had devoured long years of effort and which had never been completely successful despite the many exercises of various occult systems. I never returned to those exercises; they were quite inadequate in the sublime spiritual atmosphere surrounding the Master, which in itself permitted much faster development. The key to it – concentration – came of itself.

Firstly, I became aware that “there is a THING, above all things which I had ever known before”, and it was the most important result. This cannot be adequately described in words, but nevertheless – perhaps some direct hints will give an idea about it. The eyes of the Master conveyed in silence, that there is a State which is beyond and untouched by all human troubles that state which is Certainty and Peace in itself, in which we know everything, for then, everything is in us. This mysterious process in consciousness was induced by Sri Bhagavan or rather by his presence, for he was himself all Harmony and Peace. I tried to analyse the changes which arose in me when I meditated at his feet. I found that the mind was easily freed from thoughts, and that memory – in its usual meaning – was no more, along with its concomitant subdivisions of time – past, present and the so called future. Instead, there appeared something which cannot be properly described in words. Perhaps – a conception of Living Eternity would be best. There were no visions, but – strangely enough, one knew that there could be nothing unknown to him, for by completely directing the attention, one could know everything. These experiences have been more explicitly described in the book *In Days of Great Peace*.

In some wonderful way, the Maharshi seemed to supervise these inner processes in us, just as an operator watches the work of complicated machinery which he knows thoroughly.

Moreover, he mysteriously helped in these inner experiences, but how – still remains closed to me.

At the same time, without any deliberation from my side, a potent love for him was created in my heart, simply because it could not be otherwise. Altogether, a man emerged from these experiences greatly changed and quite often with a totally different conception about everything in this world. For myself I called it the “spiritual alchemy of the Master”.

As time passed, I ceased to consider Sri Bhagavan as a being of flesh and blood. And this was the most wonderful experience and conquest. From that time the Master could never be lost to me, although I was only too well aware that his days on this earth were numbered and few remained. I saw the Man-Spirit, the indestructible Essence instead of just the mortal frame. And this was the chief factor which enabled me to bear his physical departure without any inner catastrophe. The word “spirit” is plainly misused by the world, which cannot connect the term with anything real, often confusing it with emotional mental impressions and creating something indefinite and dim. All his long life Sri Maharshi taught, that the true Reality is beyond all forms, no matter to which plane of existence they belong. And yet, for many, many people this remains as only a myth or theory.

After the Master left this earth, I tried to analyse what it was, in his appearance amongst us, which was the most important and deciding thing for future generations. I reached the conclusion that – IT WAS HE HIMSELF, BECAUSE HE SHOWED THE EXAMPLE OF THE FINAL ATTAINMENT, THEREBY MAKING IT ACCESSIBLE TO US.

An eternal Wisdom lies in all his utterances and he confirmed It – being himself that Wisdom. For example, how could one, seeing Maharishi’s supremacy over matter and suffering when his body was attacked by a dread disease, so terrifying for the average person, ever doubt the possibility of his overcoming it, were it necessary. If such a Sage testifies

to the Immaterial Truth of being, how could I seek something apart from IT?

The Maharshi himself knew well about his deciding role in the lives of those who were fortunate enough in their karmas to come to him from all sides of the world. He says: “Association with the Sages who have realised the Truth removes material attachments. These attachments being removed; the attachments of the mind are also destroyed. Those for whom attachments of the mind are destroyed become one with THAT which is ever motionless. They attain liberation while yet alive. Cherish therefore the association with such Sages.”

Such a Sage was and is Sri Ramana, and there are many of us who used to know and revere him.

### 23. The Significance of Mahapuja\*

After the installation of a lingam on the Mother’s Samadhi regular Puja to the Matrubbhuteswara Linga commenced. (Incidentally, it was Kavyakantha who gave the name Matrubbhuteswara to the linga.) Here Kapali Sastri explains the significance of *Mahapuja*, the annual day of Mother’s Samadhi.

The *Mahapuja*, or the samadhi anniversary of the mother of Ramana Maharshi, is celebrated every year in summer, on the ninth day of the dark half of the solar month *Vaikasi* (May/June), for on that day came the solemn hour, the final samadhi, for the mother. There are two main items in the programme of this annual celebration; one is the feeding of the visitors and the poor on a large scale, the other is the special worship of the lingam that is installed over the masonry work sealing the interred remains of the blessed soul.

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\* Kapali Sastri, *The Mountain Path*, Jul. 1987.

Here we seek to throw light on the meaning of the samadhi and the worship of the lingam and the general feeding. First about the feeding: generally, food is given as a matter of charity, as service of the poor, i.e. as service of God in the poor. When the feeding is associated with a great name, a saint or a religious institution, the religious man who does not believe in this form of charity learns to tolerate it! Now let us see if the feeding in Ramanasramam is undertaken as a matter of pity for the poor, or if there is anything else behind this act of charity.

Even on ordinary days it is difficult for the visitor to return from the Ashram without the impression that the Maharshi evinces keen interest in feeding not only the hungry stomachs, but looks pleased to see that the visitor, whatever his status, avails himself of the opportunity of taking a meal at the Ashram. This is so notwithstanding the impersonal character of his dealings with men and things, of his general outlook on life, which is the inevitable expression of the intense deep life of the Truth he is centred in. Those who visit the Ashram frequently, or have made a few days' stay, have often testified to the unusual appetite for food they experience which is a special feature of the Ashram atmosphere. Most of the devotees, even when they are on flying visits, would not forego the privilege of having a meal at the Ashram as it is consecrated, sanctified by the very air of the Ashram, permeated by the Maharshi's spirit.

If these facts are borne in mind, it will be easy to understand the significance of a number of people being fed daily and of larger numbers being fed on special occasions. Indeed the Ashramites and devotees of Maharshi take so much interest in such feedings because there is the common belief, a general understanding, that food in the Ashram is prasada in the true sense of the word. It is an active symbol of the spiritual gift, a material vehicle of the awakening influence and gracious glance emanating from the presiding Spirit, namely Maharshi.

Let us next turn to the samadhi and the worship of the Lingam, and look at the question in the light of known facts about the changes in the life of Maharshi before and after his mother came to live with him in 1916. There are good people who are satisfied that the mother of Maharshi was great because she gave birth to a great spiritual figure, and became greater after the close of her earthly life, deserving a place of worship, almost for the same reason.

Looking back to earlier years, we can note certain landmarks in the story of his life that have been the stimuli for drawing him out, to be responsive to those that who sought him for help and guidance.

Another period began in 1916 when his mother came to live with him to the end. Within a short period of her advent, culinary arrangements were made, a regular kitchen was started, and visitors and devotees got lodging and boarding. In this period (1916-1922) i.e., the six closing years of her life, Maharshi began to pay increasing attention to her needs. Gracious and sympathetic, he allowed her to have her share of his love and sympathy. Such was his spiritual stature that he did not worry about the conventional Shastra that a saint must keep himself aloof from his relatives. He was preparing her for the supreme consummation, the true samadhi. Apart from his silent spiritual way of helping her to build her inner life, he gave her useful instructions, narrated helpful anecdotes, corrected some of her common old-world notions of religious virtues in bathing and eating, of the kitchen religion, but never coerced her, always allowed her to have her orthodox way. For instance, he would remark in a jocose style, “O your cloth is touched by somebody, *madi* is gone, polluted, O religion is gone... Yes, this onion, drumstick... great obstruction to Moksha!”

When the end came, the blessed lady completely resigned herself to the sage, making it possible for his grace to be effective. On the last day of her life (May 19, 1922), from morning to about 8 in the evening, the great sage sat by the

side of his gasping mother. His right hand remained on her heart and his left on her head until life in her body became extinct and the soul became absorbed into the Spirit, into the Peace that passes all understanding.

Some time after the event, when someone referred to the passing away of his mother, the sage corrected him with a curt remark, “No, not passed away, absorbed.”

On another occasion referring to the same subject, he stated, “Yes, in her case it was a success; on a previous occasion I did the same for Pazhani Swami, when his end was approaching, but it was a failure, he yawned and passed away.”

Further, explaining in part what was happening during those ten or twelve hours when his hands were on the head and heart of his mother, he said: “Innate tendencies, *vasanas* or subtle memories of past experiences leading to future possibilities, became very active. Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness, as the outer sense had already gone. The soul was passing through a series of experiences that might possibly have required many births of her, but for the quickening process worked by the special touch given on the occasion. The soul was at last disrobed of the subtle sheaths before it reached the final destination, the supreme Peace, Nirvana, Samadhi from which there is no return to Ignorance.”

Utterances to this effect regarding his mother are aphorisms for which a plain commentary is to be found in the general atmosphere and his attitude to the samadhi and the temple constructed after the event.

From Skandasramam on the Hill, he was for about six months daily visiting the samadhi at the foot of the Hill where her remains were interred, until one day he suddenly sat there and has continued to stay there to this hour. (This was written in 1936.)

“Not of my own accord I removed from Skandasramam...” he said, “something placed me here and I obeyed; it is not

due to my will, *sveccha*, it is *pareccha*, the will of others or of the Lord.” “Lord, I have no will of my own. Thy Will is my will,” is one of the oft-quoted phrases of the Maharshi.

What has been so far stated is enough to show how he looks upon this samadhi with which, one may say, commenced a new period in the history of his life and the Ashram. The fact is well-known that from 1922 onwards, Ramanasramam has been steadily growing, the teachings and the influence of the sage are increasingly recognised and spread; especially in the last half-a-dozen years the name of Ramana Maharshi has touched some of the earnest hearts of Europe and America.

On one occasion Maharshi is said to have remarked, “Where is she gone? She is here.” This was taken to mean that she, his mother, as a freed spiritual being, lived with him in his atmosphere. If so, it may be that the principle of female Energy, Sakti, was required to extend and spread the influence of Maharshi and that was supplied by his mother effectively after her samadhi. This need not be discussed further here, as it can be best understood only by students of occult tradition and knowledge of the East as well as of the West.

The greatness then of Maharshi’s mother rests much more upon other factors than on the fact of her great good luck of having been a good and pious minded mother of a spiritual personage of a rare type. Her greatness lay in her capacity to receive his help and influence in the closing hours of her life and thereby to shuffle off the subtle coils of mortal ignorance before she could get liberated into the eternal of Supreme Peace. Above all, her worth and greatness are manifest in the increasingly felt influence of the spirit and teachings of the Maharshi, spreading across the shores, and entitling her to take the place of the Madonna in the institution of Ramanasramam where the Lingam Matrubhuteswara (the Lord who has taken her into Himself) has been installed, and is offered daily worship.



## 24. He Opened My Heart\*

During my dynamic silence of thirty years, about five years were spent in going from saint to saint, Ashram to Ashram. Even samadhi was not the *summum bonum* of realisation. My heart wanted something which I did not find anywhere during my long journey from Mt. Kailas to Kanyakumari. I stood in silence at the feet of the gigantic Gomateswara up the hill of Shravanabelagola when I was living among the Digambari Jain sadhus, wearing just a codpiece. At midnight a bright face rose like the sun in the crimson dawn, and a hymn from the Vedas came to my mind, “There he rises, the brilliant sun spreading a thousand rays, the cosmic form of the effulgent splendour, unique light, life of beings!” The crimson glory opened two lotus eyes and then coral lips emitted pearly smiles.

I quickly remembered Ramana Maharshi and felt his inner call. I put a semicolon to my spiritual pilgrimage and went quickly to Arunagiri. I went up the Hill, took a bath in the waterfalls, meditated in the Virupaksha Cave and came down. Accidentally Seshadri Swami met me and smiled at me. I went near him and in his silvery voice he declared, “Go on and on, Shuddhananda, until you go deep in and in.” He accompanied me a few yards and ran away saying, “Run, run, Ramana waits for you. Go in and in.”

I reached Ramanasramam and entered the small shrine of the Mother. There was a square room adjoining it and Nayana stood up exclaiming, “Welcome, Welcome! *Swagatam!*” Ramana’s gentle voice said, “Let Bharati come in. Bharati *varattum.*”

I saw no human form. I felt dazed. An effulgence enveloped me. My mind disappeared into silence. I sat down, closed my eyes and entered the inner cave – *nihitam guhayam*. An hour passed like five minutes. I came back to

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\* Shuddananda Bharati, *Ramana Smriti*, 1980.

myself, opened my eyes and saw Ramana's lotus eyes riveted on mine. He appeared like a linga spreading rays of burnished gold. "Now you have felt That", the cave is open! The "I" is the Self-nectar!" After all these years of sadhana, here I experienced a delightful inner reality which is beyond word and thought – *Yato vaacho nivartante aprapya manassa saha*. I caught hold of his feet and shed tears of delight singing with Saint Manickavachakar, "Today Thou hast risen in my heart a Sun destroying darkness."

Blaze on, O Light Divine  
 Swallowing I and mine.  
 The Self rose like the Sun  
 The many merged into the ONE.  
 Behold the beacon of I  
 Inner Light of every Eye,  
 Towering above He, She and it,  
 A new dawn of inner delight.

(All songs that I dedicated to Bhagavan are contained in my book *Arul Aruvi*, Torrents of Grace.)

Nayana, whom I already knew in the *Gurukulam* congratulated me saying, "Like myself, you have found the right guru in the right place! Now the cave is ready for you." B.V. Narasimha Swami entered the room and said joyfully, "Happy, Happy! Bhagavan has touched your heart!"

Then Niranjanananda Swami called me to the dining room. I opened my bag and brought out ground nuts and plantains and gave them to Bhagavan. He took one fruit and a few nuts, and I took the rest as his prasada. That has been my diet for many years.

The next morning after my bath I was meditating when Ramana came and we spoke for half an hour about practical Self-Realisation. We had plenty of meetings during the nights. Maharshi is the beacon light of hope to seekers. He kept me in the Virupaksha Cave silent. Only Nayana, Seshadri Swami and B.V. Narasimha Swami, used to visit me now and then. Ramana gave a finishing touch to Sankara's "Brahma Satyam

or Brahman is the unique reality.” Bhagavan located that Brahman in the Heart and called it Heart itself:

I, I shines the Truth in the Heart’s core. That’s Brahman; be That; seek no more.

Deepam crowds disturbed my cave life in Tiruvannamalai. Ramana made me live with Nayana in a mud cottage near the Ashram. I had the joy of hearing Vedic hymns and Nayana’s verses all day long as I remained silent and self-immersed and prepared myself for the future fulfilment of my life. The last day was fully spent at the feet of Bhagavan and that was my golden day. What he taught me on that day sustained me for twenty-five years:

The egoless “I am” is realisation. The experience of “I am” is peace. The meaning of “I” is “God”. The outgoing mind is bondage; the in-going mind is freedom. The mind turning inward to the Heart brings bliss. The restless worldly mind brings bondage and misery. The triads of knower, known and knowledge are one. You go to a cinema. Observe the projector light. If the projector light fails, the whole show stops. Be Self-centered and finish your work in silence and come out. The world is nothing but the objectified mind.

## **25. Bhagavan’s Teachings and Life in the World\***

**B**hagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi has on various occasions clearly indicated the details of the path of Self-enquiry – the investigation Who Am I? – presented by him as the supreme spiritual path fit for this age. Once a person embarks on self-enquiry, sooner or later the question of how that would affect his life in the world, invariably arises.

Bhagavan never claimed that self-enquiry would lead to ‘instant salvation’, but one is enjoined to follow diligently the

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\* I.S. Varghese, *The Mountain Path*, July 1982.

path for an indefinite time – perhaps for his whole lifetime. Hence the question of how it will affect the various facets of life in the world assumes greater importance. Though Hinduism does not enjoin physical renunciation for spiritual seekers, it is generally presumed in India that renouncing the world in some form or other is necessary for all aspirants. This was also the original Christian teaching, as reflected in St. John's epistle: "If you love the world you do not have the love of God in you". (The Bible 1 John 2:15). Therefore, it was natural that many of Maharshi's followers often asked him whether they should renounce the world.

In India renouncing the world invariably means becoming a sannyasi or a mendicant (equivalent to a Fakir in Islam), one who possesses nothing, desires nothing and lives on charity. It is noteworthy that the Maharshi withheld permission in all such cases. The search was internal and the inner process of spiritual progress had nothing to do with the conditions of life. According to Bhagavan: "The one obstacle is the mind, and this must be overcome whether in the home or in the forest. If you do it in the forest, why not in the home? So why change the environment?" (*Maharshi's Gospel* – I, p. 6)

### **"ALL OUR WORKS, BEGUN, CONTINUED AND ENDED IN THEE"**

Closely allied to the problem of renouncing the world is the problem of engaging in worldly activity or work while pursuing the path of self-enquiry. Here again the Maharshi was quite categorical that work in the world need not interfere with spiritual practices. In the well-known interview Paul Brunton, the author of *A Search in Secret India*, had with the Maharshi, Brunton asked the basic question: "Is it possible to develop along the path of the spirit while leading a life of work?" and Bhagavan replied "There is no conflict between work and wisdom. On the other hand, selfless work leads to Self-knowledge." (*The Mountain Path*, October 1981, p.198.) Bhagavan has also said: "Nothing that the body does should

shake you from abidance in the Self. Such abidance will never interfere with the proper and effective discharge of whatever duties the body has, any more than an actor's being aware of his real status in life interferes with his acting a part on the stage." (*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, p. 245)

Still, many devotees and aspirants had doubts as to how a householder who is constantly engaged in the active discharge of his domestic duties could obtain supreme peace. To this very relevant question Bhagavan has said: "It is only to the spectator that the enlightened householder seems to be occupied with his domestic duties: for even though apparently engaged in domestic duties, he is not really engaged in any activity at all. His outer activity does not prevent him from realising the perfect peace of withdrawal". (*Spiritual Instructions*, p. 23.)

### **SILENCE, SOLITUDE, SELF-SERVICE**

While such basic questions and doubts about life in the world troubled many aspirants and devotees, others were worried about subsidiary problems like taking a vow of silence, the value of solitude, reforming the world, social service, political work, the right kind of food, etc. It is traditionally recognised that a vow of silence helps a spiritual aspirant to insulate himself from much of the noise and bustle of the world. However, Bhagavan saw much deeper than that and tells us that it is the inner silence that is necessary. According to him, if the mind is incessantly active and chattering, the outer show of silence, which a vow of silence enjoins, is useless. Again, about solitude, the Maharshi has said that solitude is in the mind of man. "One man may be in the thick of the world and yet maintain perfect serenity of mind. Such a person is always in solitude. Another may live in the forest, but still be unable to control his mind. He cannot be said to be in solitude. A man attached to the things of life cannot get solitude wherever he may be, whereas a detached man is always in solitude." (*Maharshi's Gospel* – I, p.14.)

With many western and some Indian visitors, it was the opposite question to renouncing the world that arose – what could they do to reform the world? A classic example of this is the following conversation between Paul Brunton and the Maharshi in the early days of Ramanasramam, in the nineteen thirties:-

Paul Brunton: Will Bhagavan give his opinion on the future of the world, as we are living in critical times?

Bhagavan: Why should you worry about the future? You don't even know the present properly. Take care of the present and the future will take care of itself.

Brunton: Will the world soon enter a new era of friendliness and mutual help or will it go down in chaos and war?

Bhagavan: There is one who governs the world and it is His task to look after it. He has given life to the world and knows how to look after it. He bears the burden of this world, not you. This is a question that seekers after Truth need not worry about. People waste their energy over all such questions. First find out the Truth behind yourself, then you will be in a better position to understand the Truth behind the world, of which you are a part.” (A. Osborne, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge* p. 155, Jaico Publication.)

However, this does not mean that Bhagavan advocated indifference to distress and suffering. What was prohibited was the egoism inherent in trying to act the part of the Supreme Power. This aspect is brought out very clearly in an exposition recorded by A. Devaraja Mudaliar: “Till you attain the state of Realisation and thus wake out of this illusory, phenomenal world, you must do social service by relieving suffering whenever you see it. But even so you must do it without *ahankara* (egoism), that is, without the sense of: ‘It is I who am doing it.’ Instead you should feel: ‘I am the Lord’s instrument’. Similarly, you must not be conceited and think

‘I am helping a man who is below me. He needs help and I am in a position to give it. I am superior and he is inferior.’ You must help him as a means of worshipping God in him. All such service is serving the Self, not anybody else. You are not helping anybody else, but only yourself.” (*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, p.94).

It so happened that from the early part of this century up to 1947 was a period of intense political activity in India. This was the time when Mahatma Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience Movement and Satyagraha were convulsing the conscience of large numbers of people in India. And the major part of Maharshi’s life on earth was also during this time. So it was natural that there were frequent questions put to the Maharshi about a political activity. It may be said at the outset that the Maharshi discouraged political activity in those seeking after Truth. Once during that period, Jannalal Bajaj, the great industrialist and Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who later became the president of India, were sent by Mahatma Gandhi to seek the blessings of the Maharshi for the Independence Movement. An extract from the exchange of Jannalal Bajaj with the Maharshi, given below, shows how far Bhagavan was from the typical independence worker:

Jannalal Bajaj: “Is the desire for independence right?

Bhagavan: Such desire no doubt begins with self-interest. Yet practical work for the goal gradually widens the outlook so that the individual becomes merged in the country. Such merging of the individuality is desirable and the karma in question is *nishkama* (unselfish). Jannalal Bajaj: If Self-government is granted for India after a long struggle and terrible sacrifice, is one not justified in being pleased with the result and elated by it?

Bhagavan: In the course of one’s work one must have surrendered oneself to the higher Power whose might must be kept in mind and never lost sight of. How then can one be elated? One should not even care for the result of one’s action. Then alone the Karma becomes unselfish”. (Talk 502)

Many persons who are active by nature find it extremely difficult to understand that in the realm of the spirit “there are no others” as taught by Bhagavan and they presume that seeking one’s own realisation is itself egoism. They forget for the time that the whole purpose of self-enquiry is to annihilate the ego. Such people often asked Bhagavan why he did not go about preaching the Truth to the people. To this question Bhagavan has said: “How do you know that I don’t? Does preaching consist in mounting a platform and haranguing the people around? Preaching is simple communication of knowledge and can be done in silence too. What do you think of a man listening to a harangue for an hour and going away without being impressed by it so as to change his life? Compare him with another who sits in a holy presence and leaves after some time with his outlook on life totally changed. Again how does speech arise?

First there is abstract knowledge not manifested. From this there arises the ego which gives rise to thoughts and words successively. If words can produce an effect, consider how much more powerful preaching through silence must be.” (Talk 285)

### **MAN IS WHAT HE EATS**

Though Bhagavan did not attach much importance to physical aids to meditation, he was very particular about an aspirant confining himself to sattvic (pure) food in moderate quantities. By sattvic food is meant vegetarian food like rice, wheat bread, fruit, milk, vegetables and such things. In one of the earliest expositions in answer to the question whether there are any aids to concentration and getting rid of distractions, Bhagavan has said: “Physically, the digestive and other organs are to be kept free from irritation. Therefore, food is regulated both in quantity and quality. Non-irritants are eaten, avoiding chilies, excess of salt, onions, wine, opium etc. Avoid constipation, drowsiness and excitement and all food which induce them.” (Talk 28). And in an answer given



to Mrs. Piggot, a foreigner, Bhagavan said: “The quality of one’s food influences the mind. The mind feeds on the food consumed.”

Mrs. Piggot: “Really! But how can Europeans accommodate themselves to sattvic food? Bhagavan: (turning to Mr. Evans-Wentz, the well-known writer on Tibetan religion) – You have been taking our food. Does it inconvenience you at all?

Evans-Wentz: No, because I am accustomed to it.

Bhagavan: Custom is only an adjustment to environment. It is the mind that matters. The fact is that the mind has been trained to find certain food good and palatable. The necessary food value is obtainable in vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian food; only the mind desires the sort of food that it is used to and considers palatable.

Mrs. Piggot: Do these restrictions apply to the realised man also?

Bhagavan: He is stabilised and not influenced by the food he takes (Talk 22)

Also, Bhagavan never advocated fasting or celibacy as necessary for Realisation, though he conceded that they can be aids to Realisation like many other things. He advised that fasting is only a temporary help and not an end in itself. Actually he has said; “Absolute fasting weakens the mind too and leaves you without sufficient strength for spiritual quest. Therefore, eat in moderation and continue the quest.” (Talk 170)

Nor did Bhagavan consider *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) as essential to Realisation. He has said: “It is a question of fitness of mind. Married or unmarried, a man can realise the Self, because the Self is here and now” (Talk 17). Also he has said: “*Brahmacharya* means ‘living in Brahman’ and it has no connection with celibacy as commonly understood” (Talk 17).

When in studying Bhagavan’s teachings concerning different aspects of life in the world, it is relevant to enquire

whether the Maharshi looked upon the world itself as unreal and an illusion. The Hindu concept of Maya has been criticised by many not conversant with its full content. There are three statements of Sankaracharya which have to be taken together to understand his philosophy of Maya. These are, as Bhagavan explained: “that Brahman is real, that the world is unreal, and that Brahman is the world. This means that when the world is perceived apart from Brahman, that perception is false and illusory. It further means that phenomena are real when seen as the Self and illusory when seen apart from it.” (A. Osborne, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*. Jaico, p.93.)

This is also very clearly brought out in the eighteenth verse of Bhagavan’s ‘Forty Verses on Reality’ *Ulladu Narpadu*:

“To those who have not known the Self and to those  
Who have known the Self,  
The World in front of us is real,  
But to those who have not known the Self,  
The Reality is limited to its names and forms,  
Whereas to those who have known the Self,  
The Reality shines devoid of name and form  
As the substratum of the world.

Know that this is the difference between the two “

(*The Mountain Path*, Oct. 1981, p. 219)

### **SURRENDER, AND GOD TAKES OVER**

Though Bhagavan prescribes self-enquiry as the supreme path to Realisation, he recognises that there is no ‘best method’ suitable for everyone. He has said: “One method will prove easy to one person and another to another. There can be no general rule”, (Talk 580). While self-enquiry suits only very mature souls, it is found that most people are of a devotional temperament which requires worship and a dualistic approach. In such cases Bhagavan always advised submission and surrender to God to the extent that one is to

do one's duty and leave the results entirely to God. To anyone who has tried it, this is an extremely difficult thing to do, as the ego always pushes itself to the forefront and expects certain results from all actions. The necessity for complete surrender is brought out forcibly in an exposition recorded in *Sad Darshana Bhashya* (p. XXV).

Bhagavan: Now, I will ask you a question. When a man gets into a train where does he put his luggage?

Devotee: Either in the compartment or in the luggage van.

Bhagavan: He does not carry it on his head or in his lap while in the train?

Devotee: Only a fool would do so.

Bhagavan: It is a thousand times more foolish to bear your own burden once you have undertaken the spiritual quest, whether by the path of knowledge or devotion.

The very first Western devotee of the Maharshi, Frank Humphreys, Assistant Superintendent of Police, Vellore, has given in moving words his personal testimony about an unseen Guide bearing the burden of spiritual seekers. "Though it takes years to find that 'That' (i.e., for Realisation), the results of this concentration (the enquiry 'Who am I'), will soon show themselves in four or five months' time – in all sorts of unconscious clairvoyance, in peace of mind, in power to deal with troubles, in power all round – always unconscious power." (Frank H. Humphreys, *Glimpses of the Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 19)

There is also a great company of witnesses from religions as varied as Roman Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism etc. of a greater power than man operating in a mysterious way in the case of people following any spiritual path in earnest. To this I can add my own humble testimony about an unseen Presence taking over all earthly concerns once we enter the path of self-enquiry. To some very complicated problems in life in the world, mysterious solutions have appeared by themselves. Also some happenings which may be classed

as miracles have also been experienced by me, though it is irrelevant to describe them here. I have written of these things in more details in *The Mountain Path* in the 1960's under the title "Light on the Path". Bhagavan's invitation is not to proceed after death to somewhere over the rainbow where skies are blue, but to enter now the beatific Kingdom of God within all of us. May the Grace of Sri Ramana Maharshi be on all who read this!

### Note:

All quotations are taken from books published by Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, except where otherwise indicated. 'Talk' refers to *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, the numbers noted after 'Talk' refer to the numbers of the Talks and not to page numbers.

## 26. Bhagavan Sri Ramana as I Knew Him\*

As a matter of my immediate spiritual experience, Sri Ramana is the living, talking, seeing, guiding transcendental Reality, bent on transfiguring with its Light the higher levels of our purified consciousness. Sri Ramana is here and now with us: he is more easily accessible to us now than he was when environed in the limitations of a bodily mansion; he is more palpable to our inner faith and thought and spirit now, than when the glimpses of his Godhead were given us through the half-closed eyes of the clay-tenement he indwelt at Arunachala.

Offer Sri Ramana the conditions of the devotion of your heart, the earnest longing of your soul, the mountain-moving faith in him, a certain receptivity to the Light and Grace of his all-pervading Presence. He is standing by you as a Reality more real than your physical experiences, than

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\* Sri Swami Sivananda (Rishikesh), *The Call Divine*, January 1955.

your mental preoccupations, awaiting, to be touched, felt and known by you. The Powers and the Presence of the liberated Consciousness of Sri Ramana are here with us, to be sensed and experienced and utilised by our aspiring natures, by our purified hearts and minds. I know of a few sadhakas who have been directly contacting Sri Ramana not only in the hours of intense meditation but in their normal life whenever they direct a single thought towards him. We would be in perpetual attunement with Sri Ramana if only we can transcend the heavy limitations; of an egoistic mode of consciousness.

The Central message of Sri Ramana was that we should subject ourselves to psychological self-observation, liberate ourselves from the ego-idea, grow conscious of the pure spiritual “I”-awareness and live in it as he lived in it all through the life of his physical embodiment and is living in it now. By the magic-working offices of prayer, by the power of the sincerity of our longing for his Experience, let us elevate our consciousness from the brilliant impurities of the mind, from the insistent vehemence of the vital nature, from every form of egoistic existence; this done, I assure you, we would experience Sri Ramana’s living Presence here and now. It is the imperfection of our surrender unto the Maharshi, of our Faith in him, of our effort to realise him here and now, that is obscuring our vision to the perception and experience of His Divine Grace, Presence, Light. Therefore, it is that we need to take to a little more of intense inner spiritual Sadhana in order that Sri Ramana may be a matter of our immediate experience: it is then that the Light and Love of all-pervading Ramana possess our entire beings and give us a knowledge as to how dynamically active he is in the higher consciousness of spiritual humanity. I offer my heartfelt prayers to Sri Ramana.

The impact of Sri Bhagavan’s Presence defies description. All who came to Him received His Grace in abundance, yet He Himself remained simple and unaffected! The author, one of the earliest western disciples of Sri Maharshi, full of devotion to the Master, was also an erudite scholar.

## **27. Bhagavan Sri Ramana: God-Reality Incarnate\***

IF a man were to do the greatest deed in the world and go and sit in the presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi he would realise that his deed was as nothing compared to the perpetual Deed of Self-realisation of the Sage.

If a man were to write the greatest book in the world and lay it as an offering before the Sage he would realise that the Sage was a greater Book, written from day to day, without any conscious effort, in the inner being of all who cared to come and read it.

Any endeavour to write about the philosophy of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is like painting the lily. It is impossible to present the Maharshi's philosophy in any better and clearer way or form than he has done himself. In the case of other personalities, it is always possible to make a distinction between theory and practice, or between spirituality and intellect on the one hand and action on the other. With the Maharshi no such distinction exists.

It is in accordance with the spirit of the time that every man, thing, or event of interest should be written about. The Maharshi is beyond the spirit of our time and long after the spirit of this age will have been succeeded by the spirit of another age, Sri Ramana Maharshi will be remembered as an Immortal. His immortality stood out from his every word and look. It lives in the inner heart of all who have had the great privilege to sit in his in his presence. It is reflected only poorly in the books and articles that have been written about him. How could it be otherwise? No one can truly describe God or Truth. Even so, no one can truly describe a Son of God and an embodiment of Truth. The *Mounam* (mystic Silence) which expresses God-Reality is the fit way of describing the Sage of Mounam also.

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\* Sadhu Ekarasa (Dr. Mees), *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*.

This article, therefore, can never do justice to the greatness of the Sage. An attempt may be made, however, to say a few things about the uniqueness of the Sage, about the Sage as Guru, and the significance of the present celebration.

After having studied the lives and ways of teaching of Saints and Sages of the world, belonging to various traditions and various periods of time, it strikes one that Sri Ramana falls into a class of his own. No one, as far as one knows, has achieved God-Realisation merely by hearing a name of God uttered heedlessly and without any preliminary instruction in philosophy or theology, without passing any traditional initiatory rites, without having a Guru, an inspirer or even only an instructor in traditional matters. But Sri Ramana received “initiation” by merely hearing the name of Arunachala, pronounced only for the purpose of conveying information about a journey. Sri Ramana claimed his spiritual heritage without even having been told that there was a heritage to claim. He knew it of his own accord. He went to claim it without receiving any directions on his way. He took it without any formalities.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana acts with regard to those who come to him for realisation, inspiration and instruction, according to his own being. As God, the Reality in the innermost Heart, he worked and works his ways directly within the heart of those who aspire to be, or consider themselves as his disciples. For this Bhagavan needed no mantras, no verses, no ritual or conventional formalities. For he was a *Guru* in the true sense of the word. The word *Guru* means ‘dispeller of darkness’. The Darkness which needs dispelling is that of Ignorance of God-Reality. The Light that dispels it is the Light of the Natural State of Being. The Maharshi’s way is as direct as it is simple. But the simple is often found to be the most difficult. Bhagavan’s simplicity was so profound that it failed to reach the consciousness of many who came to him for something definite, or rather, something finite. They desired knowledge, vision, grace, bliss, all kinds of directions and

numerous mundane things. The enquirer generally did not realise that these things themselves were only mental concepts which stood in the way of his development. Only if he was able to ignore these concepts and surrender them, as it were, at the feet of the Maharshi, his continuously radiating Light was able to penetrate the Darkness of his consciousness. It is often imagined that ‘renunciation at the feet of the Guru’ implies renunciation of worldly matters like worries, family, occupation, sinfulness and so on. But actually it implies renunciation of the mind, or, in other words, of all mental pre-occupations, pre-conceived ideas, prejudices, dogmas, physical attachments, tendencies and desires, for these various categories of thought-forms form the substance of the separate ‘I. Many times it has happened that visitors and resident-disciples have asked Maharshi to vouchsafe them initiation, grace, blessings or spiritual experience, and that he replied: ‘I am always giving it. If you cannot apprehend it, what am I to do?’ Often, however, the Maharshi, when he saw that a disciple did not respond to his *Mounam*, gave instruction on a level suited to the mind of the disciple by reciting a story, writing verses or by explaining philosophical questions.

Dwelling in the Eternal, the Maharshi made no distinctions of person, and ‘I looked with an equal eye’ on a learned scholar and a simple peasant, a Maharaja and a sweeper, an old man and a young woman, a man and a dog, a householder and a monk. But although Sri Ramana realised the mystic Oneness of souls in God-Reality, he also recognised that distinctions in the relative world of appearances have their relative value until transcended. Once a visitor said during a conversation:

‘There should be equality among men.’ Sri Ramana promptly remarked: ‘Then let them go to sleep; in sleep all are equal!’

In contra-distinction to other *gurus* of a less exalted level, who are inclined to be aware of their spiritual superiority in relation to others Sri Ramana Maharshi considered all beings to be potential *Jnanis*, whether they were aware of it or not.



Some of his utterances run parallel to that of the eighth century mystic, Hui Neng, who said: ‘The only difference between a Buddha and an ordinary man is that one realises it while the other does not.’ In one conversation Sri Ramana said: ‘Vivekananda asked Sri Ramakrishna:

“Have you seen God?” I say: “Is there anybody who has *not* seen God?”’

Sri Ramana proclaimed that life is full of latent happiness for those whose lot it is to struggle with the most depressing situations and propensities in samsara, because the Divine Heritage is ever there, waiting to be received. God-Reality is ever present within the heart of all. The act of full surrender of the man of Darkness to the Lord of Light is bound to reveal it as the dawn dispels the darkness of the night. And just as the dawn is not the first dawn, but reveals the eternal light of the sun, the dawn of Self-realisation is not a new creation, but the remembering of a lost state of consciousness. It is an entering into the ancient heritage. In this connection Sri Ramana taught that the *Guru* lives as the Immortal and Eternal Light within every being. The Path to that Guru is the Guru in the world of manifestation. The Path to the Father is through the Son. To quote the Maharshi’s own words: “One must not look upon the Guru as a person; he is not anything else than the Real Self of the disciple. When that Self is realised, then there is neither Guru nor disciple.”

Knowing the value of the tradition that he should not look upon the Guru as a person, there is for the disciple yet a very sweet and wonderful element of hope and promise in it to think that Bhagavan Sri Ramana, though a Son of God, is also a son of human parents like himself. What a world of possibilities for his own future is suggested by this knowledge! He has heard of liberated Devas or Angels, but what use is their achievement to him, for he is not one of them. But a liberated man is another matter!

In this light there is a good excuse (for fear of looking upon the Guru as a person) for celebrating the great event for

which this book sees the light of day. In this light the coming of Bhagavan Sri Ramana to Arunachala, and his fifty years' stay there, assumes significance not only for the spiritual children of the Maharshi, but for all humanity.

Fifty years! From the point of view of the restless worldly mind which delights in movement and change, an unbroken stay of fifty years in one place seems to be a tremendous achievement. It is indeed unique. But surely Sri Ramana has never looked upon it as being in any way remarkable. He has attained the Great Magnet of the World, the Centre of the Heart, and became as immovable as his Father, Lord Arunachala. How could the piece of iron leave the magnet of its own accord? It has no will of its own.

In a large number of traditional contexts, the number 50 suggests and symbolizes fullness and perfection, in connection with the World of Manifestation. In Hinduism it is found in the 50 letters of the Sanskrit Alphabet, the 50 “beads” of the *Varnamala* or Rosary of the Goddess Kali, and the 50 coils of Sakti. In Greek, Hebrew and Arabic traditions the number 50 symbolizes the manifestations of new life in spiritual birth and resurrection. In Jewish tradition the number 50 finds expression in the mystery of Pentecost, the 50th day of spiritual resurrection and joy, and in the Jubilee year, every 50th year, which was one in which spiritually a new beginning was made in the World of manifestation. The very word “Jubilee” is derived from the Hebrew word “Yobel,” which is a word for the trumpet calling men to Resurrection! The Jewish Jubilee was a commemoration of the Original State, the State of Paradise in which man lived as one with God. Bhagavan Sri Ramana calls that state the Natural State. What has been called by older traditions the Resurrection from the Dead is nothing but the return to that Original State of Oneness in which there is no separateness, duality or multiplicity. The Resurrection from the Dead is the same as the attainment of Self-Realisation which is the

reattainment of the Natural State. The end is the beginning, and the beginning is the end.

In the light of these old traditions, the event that we are commemorating assumes a special significance for all who are celebrating it. In accordance with the tradition of the Jubilee Year the event of fifty years ago is that of the Natural State of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, and the event at which it is commemorated fifty years later is that of the spiritual renewal of his disciples and admirers, and, in a wider sense, of the world.

## **28. Arunachala Stuti, the Sixth Hymn to Arunachala\***

*When Bhagavan was staying at Skandasramam, Ganapati Muni approached him, quoted a Sanskrit verse and asked him if there was any equivalent metre in Malayalam. Bhagavan replied that there was, and to illustrate it he composed the following three verses in Malayalam. Kunju Swami, a native Malayalam speaker memorised the verses and noted them down in his notebook. The verses then passed into temporary oblivion and they were somehow ignored by the various compilers of Bhagavan's collected works. The verses appeared in print for the first time in 1980 in Tamil phonetic script in a small centenary offering compiled by K. Natesan. However, until now, the verses have never appeared either in the original Malayalam or in a Tamil or English translation.*

*Sri K.K. Nambiar, a native Malayalam speaker, and one of the senior most living devotees of*

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\* *The Mountain Path*, January 1982.

*Bhagavan, has kindly provided us with the following English translation.*

**1. The Primordial Lord of the Universe, whose form is unbroken consciousness, whose feet are adored by the Vedas, who destroys sins of those who bow to him, The Lord of the mountains! bestow on me a sidelong glance with thy eyes moistened with compassion, lest I should end my life living like an animal.**

(Alternate reading of line one: “The Supreme God, Lord of the Universe, whose form is Eternal Awareness...)

**2. Arunachala, the embodiment of the eightfold form of the universe, in order that the worldly afflictions may cease to torment me (*alternatively: may be completely wiped out*), please cast thy look of Grace to help cut asunder the ego-knot without feeling its pangs.**

Note: The universe is said to have eight components: the five elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth), the sun, the moon and the jivas (individual souls).

**3. As proclaimed in the essential teachings of all scriptures, by ceaseless contemplation of the Holy Feet of the Supreme Lord Arunachala, I am sure to be freed from my innate pride, attachment, anger, delusion, lust and greed, and attain salvation (liberation).**

## 29. Set Aside Your Ego and Live Happily\*

So many scriptures are there in the world like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Srimad Bhagavatam* and *Bhagavad Gita* which have been taught over the centuries through discourses and so many books have been written on them. But have we been able to put these teachings into practice in our day-to-day life and reform ourselves so that we may be on the right path that will take us to our life's Supreme Goal – Realising the Self and ending our life cycle? What stands in our way towards achieving this Goal? It is indeed our Ego. It is ego that blocks our path of evolution. Unless we learn to conquer this vicious ego, we cannot progress and be happy in life. It is ego that brings about repeated births and its destruction is the only way of crossing this seemingly never-ending ocean of samsara.

The ego is the false 'I' which arises from ignorance. This false 'I' completely dominates our personality veiling the Real 'I' which remains hidden inside the Heart. It is like the snake in the rope. Unless the false snake is negated, we cannot see the underlying rope. Similarly, unless we set aside this false ego, we cannot realise our true Self which is the source of all our happiness and knowledge. The ego is the cause for all the agitations and negativities that arise in the mind. It is also the cause for all the frictions that arise in our relationships.

Only when the ego is set aside will the mind be calm; only when the mind is calm can we look within, and only when we look within and meditate on the Self can we traverse the Royal Path and reach our Source and become united with the Self. The ego disappears when we become aware of it and start seeking it. That is why Bhagavan asks us to enquire 'Who am I?', the 'I' here refers to the Ego. When we seek the 'I' by looking for its source within, the ego disappears and the

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\* Lakshmi Sreedhar, *Mountain Path*, Part I, II and III starting January 2018.

real Self shines forth of its own accord. There is a beautiful example given by Bhagavan: Preparations are going on for a marriage function in a hall. A well-dressed impostor enters the hall and is seen talking closely with the bridegroom's party. The bride's party therefore thinks he belongs to the other side and gives him much respect. Soon he gets close to the bride's party also. For some time, the impostor gives a nice ride to all. Each party respects him thinking he belongs to the other side. Thus he manages to enjoy good food and respect. Suddenly someone in the bridegroom's party becomes suspicious about him and goes to the other side to enquire who he is. As the impostor sees both the sides enquiring about him, he quietly disappears from the scene. Bhagavan says the ego is the impostor. It is a false entity that arises within us between the body and the Self. So long as it is not noticed and questioned, it asserts itself. When enquired as to what it is, it disappears like the impostor without a trace. So long as the ego exists, it veils the Truth and the unreal appears to be the Real.

The ego operates as 'I' and 'Mine' – 'I' is the sense of individuality and doership and 'Mine' gives rise to possessiveness and selfishness. As long as we are the Totality as the Self, the whole universe is Me and Mine. But when we separate as the ego, we become a mere fraction and limit ourselves to this body in ignorance which is what is known as the *dehatma buddhi*, and try to possess what all we can grab even by hook or crook and claim it as Mine. See the degeneration from the grand state of being the owner of this whole universe as the Self to being a pride owner of petty things as a fraction! What all we fondly claim as 'mine' do not stay with us forever as we have to leave them behind willy-nilly when the conch blows. Even Alexander the Great who set out to conquer the world left with empty hands. We are not this name and form we think we are; we are That which exists within this body covered by the *pancha kosas* and layers of *vasanas* like the cabbage being covered by several layers. The core in each of us is common; there is unity in the

diversity. For example, we go to a beach and take water in a number of buckets. The water now is separate in each bucket, but are they not the same water, from the same source? So too, we have all forgotten our common origin and our true nature and think that we are separate individuals, though at the substratum we are one and the same Self. Just as water takes the shape of the container – pot water, lake water, tank water etc., – but is still the same water, so too, the very same Self takes on the various forms and appearances in the world. Thus we have to realise our oneness at the core and end the sense of individuality that has arisen due to ignorance and delusion. If we are the Self, why are we not aware of it? It is because your mind is externalised and is on material things. Turn your mind away from the material things which lead to desires. Withdrawing the mind from them and internalising it is the beginning of spiritual effort called *sadhana* which will lead you to awareness of the Self. Unless you turn your mind in the direction of the Self, how can you become aware of it? The Self and the world are 180° apart.

How does this ego operate? The ego branches out as emotions or feelings of desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride, jealousy, hatred etc. In addition, the ego can be seen in our day-to-day activities in the extent to which we are able to adjust and accommodate others' feelings. Let me give a few examples: our elders ask us to wake up early, bathe and go to a temple because it is a festival. If we listen to them out of love and respect, though we may not like it, our ego would soften further. Instead if we refuse to listen thinking 'why should I sacrifice my sleep and go to a temple which is only a waste of time', it will only strengthen our ego. Another example: My mother is asking me to go to a shop urgently and get something she requires for her cooking and I refuse saying why should I be the person to go out in the hot sun. Here also it is the ego that makes me resist my mother's call which is my duty to fulfil. Every time there is a resistance, we should realise that it is the ego that has risen. Another example: My

mother-in-law wants me to cook a particular dish which I dislike but I do it for her sake. Here my ego has not risen to refuse her request. The ability to accommodate the feelings of others indicates the extent of our ego. How rigid are we to our views, how much can we accept and submit to others' views and feelings reflects on the extent of our ego. We can also see how much we are self-centred, i.e., how big or small are our 'I' and 'Mine'. Does 'Mine' include only ourselves or our children, grandchildren, relatives, neighbours, friends etc.? The more the mind expands, the more it cares for others and lesser is the ego. To the extent there is caring and sharing, to that extent there is lightness of ego. In fact, our culture itself promotes a joint-family system wherein there is expansion of the mind and reduction of ego. In our joint-family system, we will have so many people staying with us in one house – brothers, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins etc. So our mind goes beyond 'I' and 'Mine' to include more people in our circle causing the mind to adjust and accommodate the feelings of many people and thus the ego is not allowed to strengthen. Moreover, there is always someone to help and share our burden as there is much warmth in the relationship and there are wise elders in our house to guide us in every step. In addition, our festivals have been so designed that there is much sharing and caring as we go and give sweets to our neighbours, friends and relatives or invite a few to our house for food. Such is the greatness of our Indian Culture designed by our ancient rishis wherein the ego is not allowed to strengthen but only dissolve.

When the ego rises in our mind, there will be no peace or clarity as the Intellect will take a back seat. All our normal actions are from the Intellect while reactions arise from the ego. When the ego is set aside, the spiritual knowledge we have gained from various sources – scriptures, discourses and listening to the Guru – can be put to practice in a given situation. Then knowledge becomes wisdom and there is evolution. Knowledge unapplied in practice is useless and



only a burden of memory in the head. Real spirituality consists in applying knowledge through enquiry in every situation we face in our day-today life where emotions or frictions arise in our interactions due to ego and outgrowing them. Ego clashes are an everyday phenomenon in family life where we live and interact with so many people with diverse views. When the ego rises, it will not be possible to smoothly see through every situation as *samabhavam* will be lost. Bhagavan says that karmas have to be burnt like camphor without leaving any residue; this is possible only when reactions end speedily like the camphor. That is why camphor is used in temples at the time of *arati* to show us that we should cut off our ego quickly and burn them like camphor. Where there are reactions, karmas will not end fully and there will be residue like candle burning or oil-lamp. The longer we carry the reaction, the more the mind will become negative. This means the karma will leave a larger residue like the candle. Therefore, we should be very alert to cut off reactions at the earliest. Conquering all our reactions is the prime goal in life, as only then we will be able to retain peace and evolve in life and attain perfection.

When we can bear every situation patiently and see through it, the karma will end fully. ‘Seeing through’ means to face every situation fully without trying to escape, with equanimity, without reaction and let go of it with understanding. This is possible only when there is tremendous patience or forbearance in us which comes about only through the understanding of karma *siddhanta* and holding onto the *Sadguru* Bhagavan. Thinking of Bhagavan will give us the mental strength, and enquiry will reveal that ‘this too shall pass away’ and what comes to us is only what we have sown in the past due to ignorance. “As you sow, so you reap” is the inexorable Law of Nature. Thus we are responsible for every situation arising in our life; we are the architects of our own destiny. There is no one to blame for any situation in life except ourselves. We have to only learn to see the cause

through insight and correct the faults so as not to repeat them in the future and add to our *karmas*. Every pain (or pleasure) comes to us as destined and all are only agents or instruments in the hands of nature to inflict upon us our quota of misery. But we do have the choice of not becoming the instrument for causing hurt or harm to any living being in the world through evolution. When we evolve, we will have Wisdom and Nature cannot use us as the instrument for hurting others.

Thus we have to overcome every adverse situation through patience, prayer and positive thinking by setting aside the ego. As and when the ego rises as reactions, we have to think of Bhagavan and enquire with an open mind and make our mind positive. Then peace will prevail and the karma will end smoothly. It is not enough if we just make the mind positive. We must also understand the mistake for which enquiry is the only way. Only when there is understanding, there will be evolution. When understanding comes, we become wiser and evolve. We should never do anything that disturbs our mental peace and if disturbed, we should strive to quickly bring it back to equilibrium through enquiry and prayers. Such devotional enquiry elevates us and takes us forward on the path of evolution and helps us to traverse the Royal Path so as to end our life cycle. Thus we see that right understanding and mental strength which gives rise to patience are the *sine qua non* for any spiritual development. Leading such a life of wisdom is the true spiritual life which is not divorced from our day-to-day life in *samsara*. True spirituality is not something to be practised in isolation but in the midst of our day-to-day life.

Bhagavan says that you must love all and help all, since only in that way can you help yourself. Selfless service and prayers alone can help reduce the effects of our past *karmas* to some extent. When you seek to reduce the suffering of any fellowman or fellow-creature, whether your efforts succeed or not, you are yourself evolving spiritually, especially if the service is rendered without any expectations and without the

egoistic feeling ‘I am doing this’, but in the spirit of being the instrument of God. You no longer think you are the doer and all acts are His. This is inaction in action as enjoined in the *Gita*. Once Bhagavan was stitching leaves with reed pins to make leaf plates. A devotee who saw it remarked to Bhagavan that it was a waste of time and energy for Bhagavan himself to undertake such a task. Bhagavan said that no work is a waste of time if it serves a good purpose, and if it is done in the right way, one can learn something useful from every work done. These leaves, for instance, become important when they are used to serve food for the hungry. After the food is eaten the leaves are fit only to be thrown away. In the same way our lives become useful and sacred only when it is used to serve others. The selfish man, who lives all for himself, only wastes his life even if he lives for 100 years. He is no better than animals which also live, eat and grow. If dead leaves serve so much purpose, how much more useful should man be who is having so much intelligence with six senses? Bhagavan says that what we do for others, we are only doing for ourselves, for there are no others in the world. We alone exist in every form. Therefore, we should serve others without expectations as *nishkama karma*. Then *punya karmas* will accrue to our account. Doing noble and selfless deeds and fulfilling all our duties perfectly is the best defence against the hard blows of destiny. Only when we have *punya karmas* can we get the Grace to transform and evolve in life. In *Upadesa Undiyar*, Stanza 3, Bhagavan says, “Acts performed without any desire for fruits, as an offering to the Lord, will purify the mind and show the way to Liberation.” And in stanza 5, He says, “To consider all the eight-fold forms you see (in the world) as the manifestation of the (one and only) God, and serving them (selflessly), is the best way of worship of God.”

Bhagavan says that we should do all our ordained duties perfectly without trying to escape. If we try to escape how will the karmas end? It will come back to us later on with greater intensity, that too at a time when we are least prepared or

when our health is feeble as in old age. There are many who try to skip their responsibilities because they are difficult or boring or they are preoccupied with other worldly and social activities. If they realise that no one can escape their *karmas*, they should learn to fulfil them as and when they arise, when they are still young and strong, instead of having to face them in their old age ignorantly. Bhagavan gives an example of how a dog does its duty in the night as a watchdog. It does not sleep off. But how many watchmen sleep nicely during their duty? Man alone does not perform his allotted duties properly. Then his *karmas* will not end fully. They will not be able to retire peacefully when they are old. They will be forced to work even when they are old and weak as you would have seen many old people still working hard. If you do not want to join this list, you should learn to do your work without grumbling and finish them off timely. Bhagavan says that if we do our duties thinking of Him, we will be able to finish them without difficulty by His Grace. How to do our duties keeping our mind on Him? Bhagavan taught this to a small boy. He gave him a number of *dosas* and asked him to go on eating till He asked him to stop. The boy was asked to always keep his eyes on Bhagavan while eating. This the boy did perfectly while going on eating his *dosas*. Suddenly Bhagavan asked him to stop eating and thus taught him the art of doing his work keeping his mind on Him. Also, when we think of Him our mind gets consciously linked to Him and to His energy. This becomes our *kavacham*. When this *kavacham* is intact, the world cannot enter us and our *karmas* cannot harm us in any way. This is what Prahalada did to outwit his evil father. His father ordered him to be thrown down from the top of a hill, made a mad elephant trample him, gave him strong poison, put him in fire, drowned him in water... but nothing affected him as he was constantly chanting the name of the Lord with supreme devotion and faith. The strength of Narayana became his, and his father's cruelty could not touch him in anyway. Lord Krishna says

in the *Gita* 18:58, “By keeping your mind on Me, you will overcome all the obstacles by My Grace. But if you do not listen to me due to ego, it will be a great loss (for you).”

Bhagavan never advocates renouncing our normal worldly life of action to achieve our spiritual goals. For him only renouncing of ego is the true renunciation. Even in the *Gita*, Krishna prefers action to inaction. External renunciation is only symbolic. No sort of work is a hindrance on the spiritual path. It is the notion ‘I am the doer’ that is the hindrance. If you get rid of that feeling by enquiring who is it that works, then work will go on automatically. Thus all duties in life must be done with detachment. Bhagavan counsels us to deal with worldly affairs as a bank cashier handles the money coming to his table. During the course of the day, he receives and disburses lakhs of rupees. He is neither elated when he receives cash nor is he saddened to give money for your token. Thus we should lead our life with a spirit of detachment so as not to lose our peace. Renunciation is not running away from family to the wilderness, but to live the allotted life in a perfect manner holding onto God in every step. The lotus plant is used in the scriptures to refer to such a life. The lotus is born in the water, lives in the water and dies in it, but throughout its life, it keeps its head above the waters and the water does not wet its leaves. Thus we should live in the world and yet be out of it by not being worldly, which means a life of inner detachment. To the extent one is detached, to that extent he will be able to see through life. When we get caught in the world through sense-attractions, the mind gets externalised and goes away from its source within and experiences pain and pleasure and not happiness which is our true nature. That is why inner detachment is required which comes about only through devotion and enquiry. Inner detachment leads to sense control and enquiry leads to mind control. Bhagavan says that there is nothing wrong in enjoying what comes your way of its own accord as per *Prarabdha*. If you take what comes without any special attachment and without any desire

for more of it or for a repetition of it, it will not harm you by leading to more *vasanas*. But it does not mean that one must ‘seek’ pleasure. Just as one does not ‘seek’ pain which comes only through *Prarabdha*, one should also not seek pleasure. Sage Tiruvalluvar says in *Kural* 628, “One who does not seek pleasure and accepts adversity as natural to life, will not be affected by misery.”

When the spirit of enquiry is kept alive in us, by the Grace of the Lord, we will be able to tackle the ego when it rises provided we are alert. In *Aksharamanamalai* stanza 46, Bhagavan says, “O Arunachala, of what use is this birth without the ability to do enquiry? (Pray) come and make me fit (for doing enquiry).” Ego is the seed from which the tree of life grows. Bhagavan says that achieving egolessness is our true goal of life. Whenever the ego rises, strike it down through enquiry and prayer. He gives an example of a fort under siege. As and when a soldier guarding the fort shows his head, if he is killed, the fort will soon be overrun by the enemy. So too, as and when we see the ego rising, for which we have to be very alert, we have to cut it off through the sword of enquiry. There is no other direct method to cut off the ego. Enquiry is an all-exclusive tool for one’s evolution. It is the short cut to one’s transformation in life. That is why Bhagavan says that *Vicharam* is the shortest path to Liberation. He who practises *Vicharam* and develops devotion will have his life cycle ending in very few *janmas*. But to enquire we need to have Grace and the right knowledge. Grace comes through self-effort, devotion, *purva janma samskaras* and good service done in this birth. What is self-effort? To practise His teachings, thinking of Him and looking to Him for help. When there is self-effort and devotion, Grace comes automatically to help us succeed in our efforts. Without self-effort Grace is not possible. For instance, if a boy studies well for his exams and then prays to Bhagavan for help, he will be able to get Grace Marks to pass the exam in case he is short of marks. However, if he does not study properly due to laziness

or other distractions, how can mere prayers help him to pass his exams? God helps only those who help themselves. Even Sage Vasishta has said that failure comes in life only when there is slackness in self-effort. Sage Tiruvalluvar says (*Kural* 620) that even an adverse fate will turn its back and run away if one strives relentlessly to achieve success without getting agitated or dejected.

How does devotion help in ending ego? Egolessness is the nature of Arunachala and Bhagavan. Whoever comes to Arunachala or Tiruvannamalai with reverence for Arunachala and Bhagavan, their ego will get suppressed the moment they enter the orbit of Arunachala which the scriptures say is three *yojanas*, which is about 30 miles. When they keep coming to Arunachala with devotion and earnestness, slowly their ego will begin to evaporate. Also, each time one thinks of Arunachala or Bhagavan, a slice of their ego will be removed. That is why Bhagavan says in the opening verse of *Aksharamanamalai*, “O Arunachala, you destroy the ego of those who think of You (steadily) in their mind.” Bhagavan has said that if we take but one step towards Him, He will take ten steps towards us – such is His compassion. He that has come under His gracious look shall be saved and will not be forsaken like how a prey cannot escape the tiger’s jaws. But we have to fall a prey to Him and not to the world of maya and ego. Ego is our greatest enemy. A mind devoid of it is our greatest friend. An egoistic person hurts a number of people and creates numerous sins. A virtuous person who bears the hurts patiently is wholly praiseworthy. Sage Tiruvalluvar says that a person who harasses another gets but fleeting joy, whereas one who bears the harassment gets glory for all time (*Kural* 156); just as the earth bears with the people who dig it, so too it is best to bear with those who hurt our feelings (*Kural* 151). Thus Sages have advocated patience as an important virtue to be cultivated in life. If we enquire as to who is hurt, we will be able to realise that it is only our ego that is hurt, not the body or Self. The ego is not

me but something apart from me. Such an enquiry will help us to attain proper understanding and end our hurt feelings speedily. Thus Bhagavan's method of enquiry is the fastest way to bring an agitated mind to control. If the mind becomes emotional it becomes weak and loses control. Thus we should strive to end all emotions and agitations that weaken the mind.

Bhagavan lays a lot of emphasis on 'leaving off, many things we cling to in life – not just desires and attachments but also hurt feelings, unwanted memories of the past, fixed notions, expectations, bad habits, unwanted things in the house etc. We should not load our mind with unwanted thoughts and information which will only make it heavy. When we can leave off all unwanted things in the mind, the mind will always be light and will die off fast. The art of living is truly the art of leaving off things which are detrimental to our progress. The more we learn to leave, the greater will be the peace and happiness. Sage Tiruvalluvar says in *Kural* 341: "From whatever things you can get detached and leave off, through them you will certainly not suffer." The ability to leave off troublesome matters quickly to Bhagavan in a spirit of surrender and trust is the key to peace and spiritual progress. When we leave off problems to Bhagavan, He has an astonishing way of making things happen at the right time in the right manner. Leaving off things to Bhagavan may appear to be easy but is the most difficult thing to do. One has to have a lot of trust, understanding and devotion to Bhagavan. It is only the ego and attachment that makes us cling to unsolvable problems. Ego makes us think we can do and achieve success, and attachment makes us hold on where we have to leave. Whoever can leave wins as in the game of tug-of-war. When we let go with understanding, for which the spirit of enquiry must be kept alive always, we go above the karma and evolve and all conflicts cease.

There are three ways to learn in life:

One who is alert and whose ego is less learns and corrects himself by just seeing others.



One who has more ego learns and corrects himself when he is pointed out. Fortunate are the ones whose mistakes are pointed out. Sage Tiruvalluvar says in *Kural* 448, “The king who is without the protection of a wise man who can rebuke him boldly whenever he goes on the wrong path will perish even if he does not have enemies.”

One who has much more ego learns only when a blow comes to him. For example, a smoker who does not give up his smoking habit even when he sees others suffer or when he is told by his family, thinking that nothing will happen to him. But when he gets the symptoms of cancer, he gets scared and stops smoking or if he is a drunkard he gives up drinking when his liver is affected.

But there is a fourth category of people who are most ignorant and egoistic. They do not wake up even when a blow comes to them. They are so dull that they cannot learn and correct themselves even from blows. So they commit the same mistakes again and again leading to more *karmas* and *janmas*. They are like the rocks which break up only through repeated blows. Thus changes take place for them only slowly over a long period of time over several *janmas*.

A wise man has a keen insight and is able to see his faults as and when he commits them or when he is pointed out, and is able to correct them. Sometimes, depending upon his mental maturity he can stop it at the thought-level itself before it becomes an action. As he is very alert, he is able to enquire and understand his mistakes. Even in enquiry, we can arrive at the right understanding only if we enquire with an open mind setting aside our ego. But if we enquire with the feeling that we are right, we will not be able to see our fault. Thus we have to somehow conquer this ego and destroy it for the mind to reach its source and merge in it. Only when the mind merges in the Self, there will be Mukti.

Why are people so unwilling to change their way of life? For instance, if a person is habituated to smoking, drinking, non-veg. and other vices and sense-pleasures, he will think

that life would become a dreary waste if these have to be given up. So long as the soul does not get the food it needs and deserves, it remains content to roam in the world and feed upon the base pleasures of the world. Thus till one realises the true purpose of life or seeks something higher in life than what he has already experienced and saturated, he will not be interested in giving up things that give him joy in the present even though they may be detrimental to his spiritual progress. Unless he realises that it is meaningless to come back again and again to this world of impermanence and misery, he would not like to give up on things that he is comfortable with at present. Bhagavan says in *Aksharamanamalai* stanza 8, “O Arunachala, show me your beauty so that by seeing you, my mind that is restlessly wandering in the world may (turn towards you and) subside.”

Why does the guru take so much trouble to teach and try to transform his disciples? It is only his compassion that makes him come again and again and teach. It is not that he seeks to gain anything from his disciples as he is not interested in the material offerings of his disciples. The Guru has a great thirst or a burning desire to see his disciples evolve and attain the Supreme State of no return in the shortest possible time. In fact, the Guru would like to see his disciples excel him. Even in the *Mahabharata*, there is a fight between Parasurama and Bhishma on account of Amba who wants Parasurama to force Bhishma to marry her. Parasurama who is Bhishma’s teacher is unable to defeat Bhishma even after fighting with him for many days and ends the fight by praising and blessing the prowess of his disciple.

The Guru is only keen to see that his disciples do not stagnate on the Path or go astray. Even if they leave him, as they tend to when steeped in their worldly life, he is always waiting for them to come back. In the meantime, he keeps a watch over their life in his own way, waiting to intervene at the right moment. In the *Ribhu Gita*, which Bhagavan was fond of, even after teaching his disciple many things, Sage

Ribhu comes in disguise to see how his disciple Nidagha is progressing. Nidagha is not practising what his Guru had taught him as he is steeped in samsara. Nidagha was watching a procession in which the king was coming on an elephant, when his Guru came in the disguise of an ignorant villager and asked him what they were all seeing. Nidagha showed him the royal procession. The seemingly ignorant villager wanted to know which was the king and which was the elephant! The disciple replied with a little irritation that the one seated above was the king and the other below was the elephant. Feigning not to understand the terms above and below, the disciple was made to demonstrate so that the disguised Sage could understand them. Nidagha made the old man bend down and got on his back and said, “Now ‘I’ am above and ‘you’ are below.” Next, the poor villager pretended that he could not even understand what the meaning of I and you were. Suddenly Nidagha realised that it was his Guru who had come to wake him up from his slumber and put him back on his rails. He had been long lost in the world of sense pleasures. He fell at the Guru’s feet and again spent a lot of time learning all that he had forgotten.”

The Guru is keen that his disciples do not settle in the limelight of the world but settle in the light of the Self in the Heart. Bhagavan has said that just as a prey that has fallen into the tiger’s jaws cannot escape, so too those who have come under the gracious look of the Guru shall be saved and never forsaken. However, the disciple on his part should unswervingly follow the path shown by the Master. Thus it is a two-way responsibility. The Guru cannot by himself transform the disciple unless the disciple himself is interested to change and is willing to put in his efforts. Only in sustained Satsang will one be able to hold on to the Royal Path and make speedy progress. When Satsang is not there, the disciples tend to slip back from their Path easily. Satsang especially with our Guru is so very vital to keep our bad *vasanas* from rising and also to develop strength of mind. For instance, we make

a path in our garden for us to move about. If we are regularly walking on it, grass or weeds will not grow on it. Suppose we are away for a long time. By the time we come back, a lot of grass and weeds would have grown on the path totally covering it. Then we have to search for the path and again work on it. Similar is the case with our *vasanas*. If we do not maintain Satsang, the *vasanas* of anger, habits etc. will once again start rising in us due to weakness of mind and slackness of effort. So long as there is Satsang, only good qualities like love, generosity, helpfulness, humility etc. will rise to the top and we will behave accordingly. We should never allow these good qualities to go down and get buried once again by retaining Satsang, prayers, and enquiry. There is an incident in the life of the Buddha to drive home the value of Satsang: Once the Buddha happened to stay in a place with just one monk, the elderly Meghiya. On their round for alms, Meghiya was one day attracted to a lush mango-grove and wanted to retire to that grove for meditation. Buddha advised him to wait for another monk to arrive to take his place with him. However, Meghiya soon became impatient and on his voicing the request for the third time, the Master allowed him to go. Meghiya was very happy to receive the permission and soon he went and sat down in the grove to meditate. But soon many thoughts of his past life came to his mind. He began to think negatively as to why he had renounced the world to take up the life of a monk. He thought that had he stayed back with his family, he would not have to struggle for food by begging or lead a life of discomfort. He felt that his brother who had taken over his lands must be having a happy life and felt a little jealous about it. He felt that he should go back and reclaim his property from his brother. In this manner, many thoughts were coming in his mind when he sat down to meditate. Soon, by the Grace of his Master, he realised the mischief the mind was playing and rushed back to where his Master was staying and fell at his feet and regretted at not having stayed back with him. Buddha

explained to him that till he had stabilised his mind based on the teachings, he should never leave the shade of the Guru. Thus Meghiya realised the value of Satsang and never again left the Master's side.

For those who are in *samsara*, it is important that they go again and again to the Master till their minds become strong and they are firmly stabilised on the Royal Path.

Due to the many distractions in the world, they tend to easily slide back and get derailed. Thus the battery needs to be charged regularly. The Master is only too pleased to give them all the help they need to rid themselves of the dirt that have once again accumulated in their mind. At times the Guru may appear to be strict with us, but it is only like the dhobi who beats the clothes on a stone to remove the stubborn dirt and not to tear them. Guru is the instrument through whom God guides his devotees so that they may return back to Him. The mighty elephant of ego cannot be brought under control except when the lion of Guru comes into our life. Every person's life will continue to take the path of *Prarabdha* unless he takes some steps to change the course, like the Newton's First Law of Motion. The Guru's Grace is the outside force which comes as a *simha swapnam* to wake you up from your dream life of delusion. Old age comes by itself, no effort is required. But maturity of mind does not come by itself; it has to be earned by hard self-effort. So long as we are unaware of the true purpose of life, we will only go about filling the tummy with tasty food, dressing up like a dandy (dandy is one who is much concerned about his dress and appearance) and going about seeking worldly pleasures. Bhagavan says that if we want to sustain ourselves on the Royal Path we have to start giving up our desires one by one with understanding. Otherwise, we cannot progress on the path. Worldly desires will only take us back to the world and not to God who is 180° away within our own Heart. Moreover, any unfulfilled desire will bring us back to earth. Thus we have to conquer all our desires and

attachments and become perfect through enquiry and prayers. Giving up the worldly desires is *Vairagyam* and to traverse on the Royal Path is the true sadhana. So *Vairagyam* is a prerequisite for the sadhana to fructify. *Vairagyam* involves detaching the mind from the objects of the world and sadhana is to internalise the mind and focus it on its source. All attachments lead to misery. Swami Rama Tirtha says that if you hold a cow by the rope, the cow also holds you by the rope. The rope of attachment leads only to bondage. Why do we get attached to persons and objects we have to interact with? When we realise where all we are attached to in our life and strive to end them, we will be able to end many of our karmas we would have formed through such attachments. For instance, we are attached to some people in our family like children. If we are attached to them, we will have to face a lot of misery through them. If they don't eat properly or study well, we would be much affected leading to many arguments with them. However, if we develop detachment towards them through enquiry and understanding, we will be able to leave off the problems to Bhagavan easily and be able to retain our peace. This does not mean that we will not do our duty of telling our children when they go on the wrong path. It only means that we will not become affected when they do not listen to us. We will then be able to let go of the problem to Bhagavan in surrender.

How do we prepare ourselves so that we may lead our life after retirement in a happy and purposeful manner? This is possible if we learn to see through all the situations in life by holding onto Bhagavan and His teachings and keep doing all our allotted duties perfectly; then our karmas in life would end smoothly. By the time we become old, our minds would have grown lighter, calmer and stronger due to conquering of involvements, reactions and frictions. We would have also conquered much of our desires, attachments and expectations in life and thus be in a position to utilise our time after retirement effectively in study, prayers, sadhana and Satsang

and pursue the spiritual path in right earnest. We would not mind whether the children are with us or not to take care of us in old age. We will be able to let go anything in life easily and be strong enough to see through any situation calmly. Thus we will be able to fully concentrate on our spiritual development. Now it would be easy to do the self-enquiry ‘Who am I?’ and pursue the sadhana so as to traverse on the Royal Path leading to the Self. We would be able to easily meditate and conquer all the obstructing *vasanas* on the Path by the strength of mind achieved. If we have not led our life in the manner described above, our *vasanas* would have further strengthened by the time we become old. The mind too would be weak. Then how can we do our sadhana and destroy the *vasanas* blocking the Royal Path leading to the Self? We will not even be able to internalise the mind and enter it let alone reach our Source which is so deep within us. Thus leading the correct way of life is *sine qua non* for success in sadhana. The *vasanas* we create in our life veils the Self. Just as the clouds which are formed by the effect of the sun’s rays expand and cover the sun itself so too, all our actions take place only by the light of the Self and the *vasanas* that accrue from them are stored in the Heart covering the Self itself.

Most people who have not learnt the art of living dread the day when they have to retire as they do not know how to spend their time usefully. They get bored sitting at home not knowing what to do. Some people therefore take up reemployment to spend time. Others sit at home and meddle unnecessarily in the affairs of others in the house. Their favourite occupation is to grumble and find fault with others and offer unsolicited advice. Thus they spoil their relationship with other members of the house who begin to feel them as a burden. Thus they spend the evening of their life miserably and make an inglorious exit from the world.

Till we reach our true goal of life, we have to come back to this world again and again, willy-nilly. If we realise what it is to come back to this world of impermanence and misery, then

we all have to hasten to work out our Salvation with diligence as the Buddha said at the time of his death. Bhagavan says that the time is short and the road is long. Fortunate are those who have found not only a Guru, but a *Sadguru* (Bhagavan), to lead us to this glorious destination. This is only because of their *purva janma samskaras*. We should never fritter away this glorious opportunity that has come in our life, probably after numerous *janmas*. The knowledge has been given to us and we have to strive to practise the teachings in order to transform ourselves so that we may achieve our goal in this birth itself, for we do not know what awaits us in the next birth if we miss this opportunity. Unless we practise the teachings we will not be able to transform and evolve in life. Having all the knowledge but failing to act upon them will only lead to stagnation in life. Therefore, we have to hold onto the Path shown to us diligently. This is the self-effort required on our part. Earnest efforts never fail. So make hay while the sun shines and strike while the iron is hot. Start early, travel slowly and reach safely. Plan your work and work your plan. Today is the auspicious day to make the beginning. May the unfailing Light of Bhagavan's Grace guide us at every step so that we may fulfil the purpose of life in this very birth.

### 30. Awareness Absolute\*

It was at, Skandasramam on Arunachala that I first met Bhagavan Ramana (in January 1921). He was standing on the open space in front of the Ashram building facing the entrance as I approached. The very sight of him was thrilling; something very subtle, seemingly with its centre in that body, shone forth unlimited engulfing everything else. Needless to say I felt swallowed up by it. I stayed for a week with Bhagavan in that atmosphere of utter purity and serenity.

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\* Viswanatha Swami, 'Editorial', *The Mountain Path*, January 1976.



I heard from him how he came to Arunachala, irresistibly attracted and swept off his feet by a tremendous benevolent Force; how he was one with it deep down within his Heart almost oblivious of his body and surroundings; and how only later on, he gradually regained the use of his senses and mind and was able to look about and commune with others when they approached him.

Subsequently too, when I had come to Bhagavan for good, the effect of his proximity continued the same way and I may say that there was no necessity for any sadhana in particular on my part. Along with a few other inmates I had my share in the work of the Ashram in the elevating company of Bhagavan and I studied his few works, devotional and philosophical, and heard his replies to various questions put by visitors. But the most important thing was the mere Presence, the spiritually uplifting company of Bhagavan. As Bhagavan says in the Supplement to the Reality in Forty Verses: “If one associates with Sages, where is the need for any other rigorous sadhana? No one looks for a fan when there is the pleasant southern breeze.” The climax of my spiritual experience in the proximity of Bhagavan was during his ‘last’ moments. As I stood in that small room along with a very few others, everything became shadow enveloped by one indivisible Pure Awareness, the one and only ever-present Reality. And so, there was not the least feeling of any separation from Bhagavan or the least vestige of sorrow on that account. Not only that, there was a positive ecstasy and elation of spirit which is nothing but the Natural State of the Self.

All those who approached Bhagavan with spiritual earnestness have had this experience of direct contact with the Divine at the very first sight of Bhagavan. Ganapati Muni, the great poet and tapasvin, saw an adept (a *Siddha Purusha*, a Perfect Being) in Bhagavan the moment he first beheld him by chance on the Hill in the Ashram of Jataiswami. The scholar became a disciple. Venkataramanier

of Satyamangalam saw Bhagavan as a clear manifestation of the all-pervading Supreme Self and sang his five superb Hymns in Praise of Ramana. Humphreys saw Bhagavan as a glowing centre of Divine Radiance. Achyuta Dasa, Narayana Guru and so many others seeing Bhagavan recognised his unique spiritual greatness. Pascaline Mallet, a French lady, who stayed with Bhagavan for a few months sang in a poem in praise of Bhagavan: “One Light, One Life, One Love, shining through Thee, we see”. And Grant Duff (Douglas Ainslee), the cultured scholar and poet, says in his Preface to Bhagavan’s Five Hymns to Arunachala: “I was in direct contact with one who had passed beyond the boundaries of the senses and was merged in the Absolute Self. I do not need any proof of the divinity of Ramana Maharshi, just as I do not need any to prove the existence of the Sun.”

What is the secret behind the common experience of Divine Glory which so many intelligent devotees have had in the presence of Bhagavan? Here is the answer given by Ganapati Muni in his remarkable Hymn of Forty Verses in Praise of Bhagavan: “Bow down to the holy Guru Ramana who reaching the hidden source of the ego within has effaced all differentiation and shines forth as the One Self of all beings with various mental propensities and who is resplendent as the One Reality transcending the body and the entire world manifestation. I bow to Sri Ramana, the Great Teacher, the remover of all sorrow, who established in the Eternal Abode of Pure Awareness dispels the ignorance of earnest seekers, who though seeing and moving with the world stands as the Supreme Being transcending it.” Whatever is seen is non-Self and the Seer alone is the unchanging Self. When we take to Self-enquiry holding on to this fundamental principle of Vedanta, the physical body, the life-current operating in it and the mind are eliminated as non-Self. Even the intellect, the highest known principle in man with its reasoning faculty, must be discarded as non-Self as it is only the faculty of one behind it, claiming it as his. Who is he? He cannot stand

by himself and so he disappears. What then remains as the source of the elusive I-sense in us is the ultimate Self, which is ever there as the Ground of all that appears and disappears, of all perception in the waking and dream states and non-perception of anything in deep sleep.

Though the truth of the ultimate Self is explained within a few steps like this, the enveloping power of a mysterious force of darkness known as *avarana* in Vedanta is such that it gets eradicated only after a vigilant self-enquiry constantly carried on. The inherent tendencies (*vasanas*) of the mind based on a phantom ego get annihilated only after a continuous earnest attempt to abide at the Heart, the Source. So, Sankara says in his *Vivekachudamani* that liberation (*mukti*) is nothing but the complete eradication of the ego with all its *vasanas*. Bhagavan says in his Song on *Atma Vidya* that Grace is needed for the dawn of *Jnana* as well as earnest aspiration and devotion on the part of the seeker to deserve it. When earnest effort and Grace meet, then there is the achievement of the highest spiritual aspiration of man, viz., spontaneous inherence in the ever-present Self.

The Self is Pure Awareness, unalloyed Awareness itself, whereas the mind is awareness of this and that. The mind cannot stand for a moment without an object because it is by its very nature a subject-object phenomenon. It disappears when it is divested of objects, unable to stand by itself. And there, the Self, the one indivisible absolute Awareness shines forever as stated in *Sri Ramana Gita* (Ch. VII, v. 5): “When the ego which is but a phantom of the Self totally disappears, what remains is the real Self alone in all its plenitude and perfection. This is *Jnana*, and this is *Mukti* (Liberation).” For one established in it thus, the subject-object phenomena may appear and disappear but he will remain forever unsullied as Pure Awareness, since nothing has any existence apart from it. This is known as *Tanmaya Nishta*. Being the Self is Awareness of the Self.

From a relative standpoint, the proximity of such a Sage, normally established in the Self under all circumstances of life serves as an eye-opener for those in the clutches of delusion and as an invaluable aid supporting them in their spiritual quest. The operation of the Spiritual Force of such enlightened Ones is not limited to the lifetime of their physical body. It continues for ever and those who think of them, surrender themselves to them, study their life and teachings and try to follow them do get into the ambit of their Grace, non-different from Supreme Divine Grace. This is the experience of so many spiritual aspirants who had not met Bhagavan during his lifetime but devoted themselves to him on hearing of him or coming to know of him somehow or other. The enlightened Ones who are themselves timeless belong to all time and by their very nature shed light on the path of seekers and help them in ever so many ways.

Ultimately one sees that one has no existence apart from Pure Awareness, that there is no world apart from it and that there is no other God than Pure Awareness. Blissful Awareness is the sole Reality. Manifestation as the Many is nothing but its *Leela*. Everyone, in manifestation, has to play his part knowing at heart that it is all nothing but *Leela*, the only Reality Being Absolute Blissful Awareness.

### 31. What of us, after He went\*

Most of us here have at one time or another had the immense good fortune to meet a living Master, and to receive his darshan. Several of us have met Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi when his body was still with us. Some went to other masters, but the problem most of us have in common now is: Now that my Master is no longer here as a

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\* Wolter A Keers, *The Mountain Path*, July 1975.

talking, visible being, I am lost; and there seems to be no one who can enlighten me.

How did this occur?

I may tell you immediately that I myself suffered the same experience. When I was overwhelmed by Bhagavan's all-pervading look, my whole world changed. Who was I? I then thought ever to have imagined myself as a person sufficiently important to have problems . . . me . . . ! Now, the thing seemed solved once and forever.

But after Bhagavan left the physical body, gradually my old problems returned, and three or six months later, I felt desperately in need, once again, of someone who would show me where I went off the rails.

I feel that, basically, all of us here have made the same mistake. We have tried to return to the Experience that was (and no doubt still is) Bhagavan, without realising that the one who wants to get back to that Experience is precisely the one that makes the Experience impossible. In other words: if I, personality or ego, try to get back to impersonality, I am trying to find dry water or square circles. Impersonality, *Atma*, is the absence of the seeker. The presence of the Ultimate Experience, we saw as our Master, was at the same time the absence of the seeker . . . of the troubled and agonised ego.

But, when the Master's presence or his words no longer corrected us, we started to seek happiness and peace for the ego or personality, instead of realising that *ananda* is the absence of ego or personality.

How may we overcome this difficulty?

It is not too difficult, but it takes time. As we are all Europeans here today, I shall employ terminology to which we are used.

It is extremely important to see that our whole life is one gigantic projection. We don't see ourselves as we are or the rest of the world, as it is, but we see everything in the coloured interpretation of our egoism, i.e., of our defences. When we are sad, the entire world seems sad, and when we

are happy, the entire world seems happy. In other words, we don't see the world, but we see our own standpoint projected left, right and centre. As long as all kinds of fears are crowding the mind, I hate people whose presence reminds me of those fears, and I love people whose presence does not, so that the fears lie dormant, and I enjoy peace of mind.

But peace of mind is no peace at all, it is a mere absence of acute pain, but it is a sleepy kind of state. Peace, real peace or moksha, is absence of mind, and not at all a mind lulled into cosiness. Nor is it what we call absent-mindedness in our daily speech.

I don't know if you were aware of the fact that I have just been quoting Ramana Maharshi, although not quite literally. He said: A sage or an enlightened being is a person without a mind.

In saying so, Bhagavan was in perfect accord with what all authentic Masters have been saying throughout the centuries, even before Sankara. But we cannot hear it often enough, as this little phrase contains the key to the problem we are discussing today.

Moksha is living without a mind in other words without the slightest trace of a feeling that 'I am the thinker and the doer' and even without a trace of the feeling "I am not the thinker and not the doer". Moksha is the total disappearance of even the last trace of the feeling that I am somebody, positive or negative.

Is this not the key we have lost?

Most of us, instead of seeing through the fact that ego and personality are illusions, have gone in the opposite direction, and have started to polish them up to exercise them and make them purer. That is a foolish thing to do, because a golden chain binds us just as much as an iron chain, and I would rather throw away an iron chain than a beautiful golden one.

When you have an old chair in your house and you decide to get rid of it, are you going to paint it or wax it the moment before throwing it away? Or try to teach it to talk?

Let us try and see what Bhagavan and all authentic Masters mean when they tell us that freedom is ‘being without mind’.

You are there, as living, conscious presence, before the thought appears, when it is there, and after it has disappeared. In other words: you, as this Presence, are not limited in any manner by such thoughts. And if thought cannot limit you, nothing can, for the only thing with which we ever come into contact is thought.

So one must go about it in a different manner, by looking alone. In the end you will find that even the desire for Self-Realisation drops away, when the seeker is completely exposed in his poverty and littleness. At that moment you discover that you are what you have been looking for: that the seeker minus the masks of his pseudo selves is the sought. At that moment you will be one with your Master. But then, of course, there is no ego, no personality to claim this oneness just as in deep sleep there is no one to claim that “I am sleeping.”

### **32. Bhagavan and Thayumanavar\***

Thayumanavar was a distinguished Tamil poet-saint who lived in the first half of the eighteenth century, from 1705 to 1742 AD. His devotional poetry was frequently cited by Bhagavan, with obvious approval, and many Ramanasramam books record fragments of his poems that Bhagavan either read out or quoted from memory. However, in most cases the full verse is not given in the ashram literature. In this article we are presenting the complete versions of most the verses that Bhagavan referred to, giving, wherever possible,

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\* Robert Butler, T.V. Venkatasubramanian & David Godman, *The Mountain Path*, October 2004.

the circumstances and context in which they were quoted.\* We do not propose to analyse Thayumanavar's poetry or philosophy in any great detail; we merely wish to present, in a full form, those portions of his work that particularly appealed to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan was sometimes so emotionally moved when he read out verses by Thayumanavar, he would be unable to continue. Devaraja Mudaliar, who was responsible for recording many of Bhagavan's references to Thayumanavar, wrote about this on two occasions:

I may here record that I have noticed on more than one occasion in the past how Bhagavan could not proceed with the reading of any deeply devotional portions of Tamil works such as *Tevaram* and *Thayumanavar*.†

... when touching songs were recited or read out before him, or when he himself was reading out to us poems or passages from the lives or works of famous saints, he would be moved to tears and find it impossible to restrain them. He would be reading out and explaining some passage and when he came to a very moving part he would get so choked with emotion that he could not continue but would lay aside the book. To quote a few instances, such a thing happened when he was reading and explaining some incidents in Sundaramurti Nayanar's life in connection with the *Tiruchuzhi Mahatmyam*, and also when he was reading out 'Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam' in Thayumanavar's works, and came to the twenty-fourth verse:

Conceiving you as everything from earth to space,

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\* We have not been able to identify all the verses since some of the references are too general.

† *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 12th December 1945, afternoon session.



I shall record my thoughts on the large page of my mind,  
and looking at that image ever and again, I shall cry out:  
‘Lord of my life, will you not come?’

Repeatedly believing myself to be You,  
I am unable to fix my attention on anything else.  
Lamenting in this way, like one whose heart is wounded,  
dissolving inwardly, so that tears pour down in floods,  
uttering deep sighs, unaware even of my body,  
I stand transfixed.

His [Bhagavan’s] eyes were so filled with tears  
and his throat so choked with emotion [as he read  
these words] that he had to put aside the book and  
break off his discourse.\*

Thayumanavar was brought up in the Tanjavur District of Tamil Nadu in the coastal town of Vedaranyam. His father, Kediliappa, came from an agricultural background but progressed from being a farmer to being the administrator of the local Vedapureeswarar Temple. He carried out this responsibility so well, he was subsequently offered the job of palace manager and royal advisor by Vijayaranga Chokkalinga Naicker, the reigning Prince of Tiruchirapalli. When Thayumanavar was born, his father named him after Thayumaneswarar, the presiding deity in the temple of Siragiri, which is nowadays known as the Tiruchirapalli Fort Temple.

Thayumanavar received a good education at court in which he ended up acquiring an outstanding knowledge of both Sanskrit and Tamil language and literature. He must also have made a good impression on the royal family because,

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\* *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 45-6, 1992 ed. The translation from the ‘Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam’ verse was done by the joint authors of this article. We have made new translations of all the Thayumanavar verses that appear in this article and have inserted them at the appropriate places, that is, whenever Bhagavan quotes from them or refers to them.

when his father passed away, Thayumanavar, who was still in his teens, was considered qualified to take over his job. He subsequently managed the financial affairs of the kingdom and apparently fulfilled his duties with some distinction. However, while this was going on, his religious yearnings impelled him to look for a Guru who could help him to progress spiritually. Unfortunately, as many seekers have discovered before and since, such beings are hard to find. In later life Thayumanavar wrote about the qualifications that are necessary for one who is looking for a qualified Guru. Bhagavan once cited this verse, and endorsed its contents, in the following dialogue:

**Question:** What is satsang?

**Bhagavan:** Satsang means only *Atma sang* [association with the Self]. Only those who cannot practise that are to practise being in the company of realised beings or sadhus.

**Question:** When does one get the company of sadhus?

**Bhagavan:** The opportunity to be in the company of a *Sadguru* comes effortlessly to those who have performed worship of God, *japa*, *tapas*, pilgrimages etc for long periods in their previous births. There is a verse by Thayumanavar that points out the same thing:

For those who, in the prescribed manner,  
have embarked upon the [pilgrim] path  
of divine images, holy sites and holy tanks,  
a *Sadguru*, too, will come  
to speak one unique word,  
O Supreme of Supremes!\*

Only he who has done plenty of *nishkamya punyas* [austerities performed without any thought of a reward or consequence] in previous births will

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\* ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 156.

get abundant faith in the Guru. Having faith in the Guru's words, such a man will follow the path and reach the goal of liberation.\*

We can assume that Thayumanavar had the requisite qualifications since his search for a teacher ultimately led him to a man called Arul Nandi Sivachariar, who was also known as 'Mauna Guru'. This teacher could trace his lineage back to the famous saint Tirumular, whose book, *Tirumandiram*, written well over a thousand years ago, became one of the canonical works of Saivism.

When Thayumanavar approached him and asked if he could become his disciple, Mauna Guru nodded his head, thereby giving his consent. Thayumanavar then asked if he could follow him wherever he went. Mauna Guru responded by telling him '*Summa iru*,' which can mean 'Be still,' 'Be quiet,' and also 'Remain as you are'. This one phrase apparently brought about a major spiritual transformation in Thayumanavar. In later years, when he began to write ecstatic devotional poetry, he frequently mentioned this event, this phrase, and the effect it had on him. He frequently called it 'the unique word' in his verses (including the one cited in the last quotation).

This phrase was also used by Bhagavan, often with similarly dramatic effect. Muruganar has written in several of his poems that Bhagavan enlightened him by uttering this phrase:

Saying, 'Enough of dancing, now be still [*summa iru*],' *Padam* [Bhagavan] bestowed on me the state of true *jnana* that exists forever in my Heart as my own nature.

The sovereign grace of *Padam* completed my sadhana with the words 'Be still'. What a wonder is this!†

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\* *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, 2nd ed., pp. 220-1.

† *Padamalai*, 'Padam's Grace Towards Muruganar', vv. 168, 170, p. 354.

In a recent issue of *The Mountain Path*\* there was a report of how a shorter version of this phrase, ‘iru’, meaning ‘be’ or ‘stay’, effected a life-transforming change in Tinnai Swami.

The ‘unique word’, *summa iru*, uttered by a qualified Guru, has an immediate and liberating impact on those who are in a highly mature state. For the vast majority, though, hearing this word from the Guru’s lips is not enough. Bhagavan discussed this in the following dialogue, which he illustrated with more verses from Thayumanavar.

A young man from Colombo asked Bhagavan, ‘J. Krishnamurti teaches the method of effortless and choiceless awareness as distinct from that of deliberate concentration. Would Bhagavan be pleased to explain how best to practise meditation and what form the object of meditation should take?’

**Bhagavan:** Effortless and choiceless awareness is our real nature. If we can attain it or be in that state, it is all right. But one cannot reach it without effort, the effort of deliberate meditation. All the age-long *vasanas* carry the mind outward and turn it to external objects. All such thoughts have to be given up and the mind turned inward. For that, effort is necessary for most people. Of course, every book says ‘*Summa iru*’ i.e., ‘Be quiet or still’. But it is not easy. That is why all this effort is necessary. Even if we find one who has at once achieved the *mauna* or supreme state indicated by ‘*Summa iru*’ you may take it that the effort necessary has already been finished in a previous life. So, that effortless and choiceless awareness is reached only after deliberate meditation. That meditation can take any form which appeals to you best. See what helps you to keep

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\* *The Mountain Path*, ‘*Aradhana*’ issue, 2004, pp. 75-83.

away all other thoughts and adopt that method for your meditation.

In this connection Bhagavan quoted verses 5 and 52 from ‘Udal Poyyuravu’ and 36 from ‘Payappuli’ of Saint Thayumanavar. Their gist is as follows. ‘Bliss will follow if you are still. But however much you may tell your mind about the truth, the mind will not keep quiet. It is the mind that won’t keep quiet. It is the mind which tells the mind “Be quiet and you will attain bliss”.’ Though all the scriptures have said it, though we hear about it every day from the great ones, and even though our Guru says it, we are never quiet, but stray into the world of maya and sense objects. That is why conscious deliberate effort is required to attain that *mauna* state or the state of being quiet.\*

This is the full version of the three verses that Mudaliar summarised:

‘Remain still, mind, in the face of everything!’  
 This truth that was taught to you,  
 where did you let it go?  
 Like wrestlers, bent upon their bout,  
 you raised your arguments.  
 Where is your judgement? Where, your wisdom?  
 Begone!†

Bliss will arise if you remain still.  
 Why, little sir, this involvement still  
 with yoga, whose nature is delusion?  
 Will [this bliss] arise  
 through your own objective knowledge?  
 You need not reply, you who are addicted to ‘doing’!  
 You little baby, you!‡

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\* *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11th January, 1946.

† ‘Udal Poyyuravu’, verse 5.

‡ ‘Udal Poyyuravu’, verse 52.

Though I have listened unceasingly to the scriptures  
 that one and all declare,  
 ‘To be still is bliss, is very bliss,’  
 I lack, alas, true understanding,  
 and I failed even to heed  
 the teachings of my Lord, Mauna Guru.  
 Through this stupidity  
 I wandered in maya’s cruel forest.  
 Woe is me, for this is my fated destiny.\*

One may presume from the complaints in the last verse that Thayumanavar was not one of the fortunate few who attained liberation instantly merely by hearing his Guru tell him ‘*Summa iru*’. As Bhagavan remarked in an earlier quotation, it is necessary for almost all people to make some conscious effort to control the mind. Mauna Guru, Thayumanavar’s Guru, accepted that this was the case with Thayumanavar and he consequently gave him detailed instructions on how he should pursue his sadhana. Thayumanavar recorded many of these instructions in his verses, some of which were selected by Bhagavan and included in the Tamil *parayana* at Ramanasramam.†

During Bhagavan’s lifetime Tamil poetic works were chanted in his presence every day. Initially, at Skandashram, only *Aksharamanamalai* was chanted, but as the years went by, more and more works were added. By the 1940s there was a prescribed list of poems, all selected by Bhagavan himself, that took fifteen days to complete at the rate of about one hour per day.

These are some of the verses from Thayumanavar that Bhagavan selected. The first three describe the suffering

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\* ‘Payappuli’, verse 36. Bhagavan also quoted this verse ‘Udal Poyyuravu’, verse 52, in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 646.

† A reference to this selection was made in *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, by Devaraja Mudaliar, p. 54, 1992 ed.

inherent in samsara, while the remainder contain Mauna Guru's prescriptions for transcending it:

In all people, as soon as the ego-sense  
known as 'I' arises to afflict them,  
the world-illusion, manifesting as multiplicity,  
follows along behind.

Who might have the power to describe the vastness  
of the ocean of misery that grows out of this:  
as flesh; as the body; as the intellectual faculties;  
as the inner and the outer; as the all-pervasive space;  
as earth, water, fire, and air; as mountains and forests;  
as the multitudinous and mountainous visible scenes;

as that which is invisible, such as remembering and forgetting;  
as the joys and sorrows that crash upon us,  
wave upon wave, in maya's ocean;  
as the deeds that give rise to these;  
as the religions of manifold origin  
that [try to] put an end to them;  
as their gods, as their spiritual aspirants, and as the methods  
described in many a treatise that bear witness to their practices;  
and as the doctrinal wrangling amongst them?  
It is like trying to count the fine grains of sand on the seashore.

In order to teach me to discern the truth  
of how all these woes, impossible to measure –  
which spontaneously accumulate, multiplying bundle by bundle –  
were insubstantial, like the spectacle of a mountain of camphor  
that disappears entirely at the touch of a flame,  
he associated with food, sleep, joy, misery, name-and-place,  
and wearing a bodily form similar to my own,  
he came as the grace-bestowing Mauna Guru  
to free me from defilement, in just the same way that a deer  
is employed to lure another deer.\*

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\* 'Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam', vv. 15-17.

The idea that God takes on a human form to catch other beings who have this same form is one that appears in many spiritual texts. Bhagavan explained this particular reference in the following reply:

The Master appears to dispel ... ignorance. As Thayumanavar puts it, he appears as a man to dispel the ignorance of a man, just as a deer is used as a decoy to capture the wild deer. He has to appear with a body in order to eradicate our ignorant 'I am the body' idea.\*

The next six verses contain the *upadesa* that Mauna Guru gave to Thayumanavar, and a description of the effect it had on him:

Coming thus, he claimed my body, my belongings,  
my very life as his possessions,  
and teaching the path of rejection, he declared:  
'The five senses, the five elements,  
the organs of action, and all the rest,  
you are not. You are none of these.  
Nor are you any of the qualities that pertain to these.  
You are not the body, nor are you knowledge and ignorance.  
You are chit, the real, which is like a [colourless] crystal,  
that appears to assume the colours  
of whatever is placed before it,  
and yet having no connection with it.  
It is my inherent nature to enlighten you  
when I find that you are ripe for it.'

'If you desire to gain the vast, supreme reality  
that is the temple of refreshing grace,  
inseparable from all that is, becoming pure consciousness  
and obtaining the indestructible state whose nature is bliss,  
listen as I explain to you the proper means:  
May you live long, winning in your heart

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\* *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 398.



the reality that is devoid of all qualities!  
 May you attain the state of bliss-consciousness,  
 so that all the dense accumulation of ignorance disappears!  
 May you liberate yourself from bondage!’

Through his grace, he imparted to me the state of mauna,  
 the true knowledge in which bondage is abolished:  
 ‘For that state, there is no thought, no “I” sense,  
 no space, no time, no directions, no pairs of opposites,  
 nothing lost, nothing other, no words,  
 no phenomena of night and day,  
 no beginning, no end, no middle, no inner or outer.  
 Nothing is.’

‘When I say: “It is not, it is not”,  
 this is not a state of nothingness.  
 It is pure identity; it is the nature that eternally endures,  
 a state that cannot be expressed in words.  
 It is the *swarupa* which engulfs everything,  
 so that neither ‘I’ nor anything else appears.\*  
 As the day consumes the night, it consumes ignorance entirely.  
 Easily overcoming and swallowing up  
 your personal consciousness, it transforms your very self,  
 here and now, into its own Self.  
 It is the state that distinguishes itself as self-luminous silence.’

‘Other than the nature that is its own Self,  
 it allows nothing else to arise.  
 Because there is no other consciousness,  
 should anything attempt to arise there  
 it will, like a camphor flame, vanish.  
 The knower, devoid of both knowledge and objects known,  
 falls away, without falling, since it still remains.  
 But who can tell of its greatness, and to whom?  
 By dint of becoming That, one exists only as That.  
 That alone will speak for itself.’

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\* This could also be translated as ‘neither *jiva* nor Iswara appears’.

‘If we call it “That”, then the question will arise,  
“What is That?”

Therefore did Janaka and the other kings  
and the rishis, foremost among whom is Suka,  
live happily, like bees intoxicated with honey,  
entirely avoiding any mention of “That”.  
Remain in this state.’\* Thus did he speak.  
Grant me the abundance of your grace  
so that, in the nirvikalpa state of total tranquillity,  
I may know and attain the condition of supreme bliss,  
in accordance with your rule.  
I shall not sleep or take up any other work  
until I attain this state.†

Thayumanavar’s reverence for his Mauna Guru, for the teachings he gave him, and for the experiences he ultimately bestowed on him, were the subject of another poem that Bhagavan mentioned. The subject arose when Bhagavan was asked about the necessity of having a Guru:

‘Is it possible to gain knowledge without the blessings of a Guru?’ asked a devotee. Even Rama, who was like a dullard in his early life, became a realised soul only with the help of his Guru.’

‘Yes, said Bhagavan, ‘how can there be any doubts?’ The grace of the Guru is absolutely necessary. That is why Thayumanavar praised his Guru in his hymns:‡

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\* This can also be translated as ‘This is the state of the Self’.

† ‘Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam’, vv. 18-23.

‡ *Letters and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 26.

The verse that follows was not specifically mentioned by Bhagavan. We have inserted it here because it closely resembles the contents of a verse by another author that Bhagavan quoted immediately after mentioning Thayumanavar. That verse said: ‘O Gurudeva, your look falling upon it, a tiger becomes gentle like a goat, a snake like a squirrel, and a bad man becomes a good man ’

At your [Mauna Guru's] glance,  
 the tiger that roams the forest  
 will sport with the cow.  
 At a sign of your hand,  
 the rutting elephant will come,  
 carrying with his trunk  
 a huge load of great logs for a bonfire.  
 Kamadhenu herself will attend  
 your golden feet,  
 saying, 'Your meal is prepared'.  
 Kings of the earth, and kings of verse  
 will laud you as the king of *tapas*,  
 crying out 'Victory and praise to you!'  
 At the mere sight of your face,  
 abode of knowledge and compassion,  
 the nine *siddhas* will desire your friendship.  
 Realised sages, with Suka  
 and Vamadevar at their head,  
 will express their admiration for you.  
 Is it easy to tell of the greatness of you,  
 before whom both heaven and earth  
 come to offer their worship?

Mantra Guru! Yoga Tantra Guru!  
 Mauna Guru, sprung from Tirumular's ancestral line!\*

Bhagavan concluded his description of the greatness of the Guru by commenting, 'The Guru's grace is extraordinary'.<sup>†</sup>

Having been refused permission to follow Mauna Guru wherever he went, Thayumanavar continued to serve at the royal court. After some time, though, the prince, who was a pious man himself, noticed the depth of Thayumanavar's devotion and offered to release him from his service. When Thayumanavar told the prince that he just wanted to spend

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\* 'Maunaguru Vanakkam', verse 7.

† *Letters and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 26.

his life in meditation, the prince accepted his resignation and gave him a small house on the banks of the River Kaveri where he could meditate undisturbed. The prince, who had recognised his holiness, visited him regularly and often brought him gifts.

In 1731 the prince, who apparently was not a very able ruler, died soon after losing a major battle to an army that had attempted to invade part of his territory. His widow, Rani Meenakshi, took over the running of the kingdom. She came to Thayumanavar for advice on how to run the country's affairs, and for some time he had to go back to his former job as a royal advisor. However, in an unexpected turn of events, Meenakshi fell in love with him and started to make amorous advances. Thayumanavar decided that the only way to escape her sexual demands would be to flee to a place that was beyond her jurisdiction. With the help of Arulayya, one of his devotees, he escaped, disguised as a soldier, and eventually moved to Ramanathapuram, where the local raja welcomed him and arranged for him to stay in a quiet place where his meditations would not be disturbed. For some time, he lived a very ascetic life there.

Rani Meenakshi ran her kingdom very badly. In 1736 her country was overrun by various invaders and she ended up committing suicide by drinking poison. Siva Chidambaram, Thayumanavar's elder brother, came in person to tell Thayumanavar that it was safe for him to return home, if he wanted to, since there was no longer any danger of royal revenge. He went back to his ancestral home where he was treated with great reverence by both his family and his community. However, a surprise was in store for him. His family wanted him to marry, and they were backed up by Mauna Guru who told Thayumanavar that it was his destiny to get married and have a child. In obedience to his Guru's wishes, he married a girl called Mattuvarkuzhali and they eventually had a son whom they named Kanakasabhapati. The marriage did not last long because Mattuvarkuzhali died soon

afterwards, leaving Thayumanavar with the responsibility of bringing up a child.

Around this time Mauna Guru visited him again to give him darshan and instructions, one of which was to make a pilgrimage to Chidambaram. During their meeting Thayumanavar went into a deep samadhi that lasted for several days. When he returned to his normal consciousness, he realised that he could no longer fulfil his duties as a householder and a father. He handed over the care of his son to his older brother and left for Chidambaram.

Thayumanavar spent about two months in Chidambaram, mostly immersed in a deep samadhi state. He then embarked on a pilgrimage that took him to several of the sacred places in Tamil Nadu, including Tiruvannamalai, Kanchipuram, Tiruvarur, Madurai and Tiruvotriyur. His final destination was Rameswaram at the southern tip of India. Shortly after his arrival there he made a very public appeal in the temple for God to intervene and end a drought that had severely afflicted that part of the country. An immediate and torrential downpour filled all the tanks and wells. Thayumanavar, who generally shunned publicity as much as possible, found himself being carried in triumph through the streets of Ramanathapuram on a palanquin. He was feted by the local king, the Raja of Ramnad, and even offered a new job as a royal advisor.

Thayumanavar rejected all the royal honours and spent the remainder of his brief life in a small hut, meditating and composing the songs that were to make him famous. His two principal disciples, Arulayya and Kodikkarai *Jnani*, wrote down the poems and began to sing them in public. They were immediately popular and spread widely even during Thayumanavar's lifetime.

In January 1742 he withdrew into his hut and left the following message pinned to the outside of the door:

Dear friends,

Withdraw the mind from the senses and fix it in meditation. Control the thought-current. Find

out the thought-centre and fix yourself there. Then you will be conscious of the divine Self; you will see it dancing in ecstasy. Live in that delight. That delight-consciousness is the God in you. He is in every heart. You need not go anywhere to find Him. Find your own core and feel Him there. Peace, bliss, felicity, health – everything is in you. Trust in the divine in you. Entrust yourself to His Grace. Be as you are. Off with past impressions! He who lives from within an ingathered soul is a real sage, even though he may be a householder. He who allows his mind to wander with the senses is an ignoramus, though he is learned. See as a witness, without the burden of seeing. See the world just as you see a drama. See without attachment. Look within. Look at the inner light unshaken by mental impressions. Then, floods of conscious bliss shall come pouring in and around you from all directions. This is the supreme Knowledge; realise! *Aum! Aum!\**

This was his final message. When Arulayya went in he found that Thayumanavar had left his body. He was given a royal funeral in Ramanathapuram by the local raja, and his songs were sung as his body was interred.

\*   \*   \*

The remainder of this article is divided into several topics, each of which explores some aspect of Thayumanavar's teachings that Bhagavan referred to while he was responding to questions from visitors.

### **The state of the Self**

This first section begins with a discussion that centred on experiences that Tennyson, the famous 19th century English poet, induced in himself:

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\* *The Silent Sage*, by Dr. B. Natarajan, pub. The Himalayan Academy, 1978.

In continuation of yesterday's conversation about Tennyson, the relevant passage was found in a footnote to the English translation of *Upadesa Saram*. It was not in a poem but in a letter to B.P. Blood. Bhagavan asked me to read it out, so I did: '...a kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself, silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being: and this is not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was a laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.'

Bhagavan said: 'That state is called abidance in the Self. It is described in a number of songs.'

He took up Thayumanavar and it opened at the very page he was looking for...\*

Mauna Guru, you who declared:

'The state in which there is neither merging nor separation,  
no pairs of opposites, no expansion or contraction,  
no qualities, no coming or going,  
that leaves no lasting trace;  
that is free of the three defilements;  
that cannot be conceived  
in terms of having a top, bottom or sides;  
that in which there is neither *bindu* nor *natham*,  
and in which the five elements,  
variously constituted, do not exist;  
that in which the knower and his knowledge are not;  
that which is without decay;

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\* *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

that which, moreover, it is not one and not two,  
and is without voice and without mind;  
that which is free, even, of the ecstatic seeking,  
wherein [the devotee] tastes with his lips,  
and drinks from the ocean of bliss  
that is the eternally enduring  
supreme and all-pervading reality –  
that is the enduring state.’

Siddhanta Mukti’s Primal Lord!

Dakshinamurti, enthroned in glory upon the lofty Siragiri!  
Guru, you who are pure consciousness’s form!\*

Bhagavan quoted two other Thayumanavar verses on this occasion, but they are not really expressions of what the Self is like. They are, instead, pleas from a disciple who wants to attain this state. Bhagavan mentioned them because he said that they both contained references or allusions to the *sahaja nishta*, the natural state of abidance in the Self.†

Reality, pervading everywhere!

Like a supplicant who seeks the favour of a benefactor  
begging him, in a manner free of all reproach,  
to show compassion and grant his petition  
[I apply to You]. Hear my plea! O Transcendent Supreme!  
Listen to the petition of one  
whose heart is of wood and show pity.  
[My plea is] to dwell in *mauna*  
in the fullness of your ethereal grace,  
the state of *sahaja nishta*.‡

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\* ‘Chinmayanandaguru’, verse 8. The last three lines, detached from the main verse, are the refrain. Siragiri is the hill at Tiruchirapalli. *Bindu* and *natham*, which are mentioned in the middle of the verse, are Saiva Siddhanta terms that denote the place or point from where the universe emerges and evolves.

† *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

‡ ‘Asaienum’, verse 2.



...Well indeed does your divine mind know  
 how my heart melted in tender love,  
 how I languished,  
 hoping that I might clearly apprehend this state.  
 If I try to abide in this state for a while,  
 then my ignorance, a foe posing as a friend,  
 comes and makes my mind its home.  
 Shall defiling maya and karma return again?  
 Shall births, in unbroken succession, assault me?  
 These thoughts fill my mind.  
 Lend me the sword of true steadfastness [*sraddha*],  
 give me the strength of true *jnana*  
 so that my bondage is abolished;  
 guard me, and grant me your grace!

Consummate perfection of bliss,  
 whose abundant fullness reigns,  
 without exception, everywhere I look!\*

In the next dialogue Bhagavan is questioned about *turiya*, the underlying substratum of the Self in which the three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping appear and disappear. He answered the query about these states and concluded with a brief quotation from Thayumanavar:

**Question:** How are the three states of consciousness inferior in degree of reality to the fourth? What is the actual relation between these three and the fourth?

**Bhagavan:** There is only one state, that of consciousness or awareness or existence. The three states of waking, dream and sleep cannot be real. They simply come and go. The real will always exist. The 'I' or existence that alone persists in all the three states is real. The other three are not real

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\* 'Paripurnanandam', verse 5. Maya and karma, mentioned in the middle of the verse, are, according to Saiva Siddhanta, two of the three impurities of the individual self.

and so it is not possible to say that they have such and such a degree of reality. We may roughly put it like this. Existence or consciousness is the only reality. Consciousness plus waking we call waking. Consciousness plus sleep we call sleep. Consciousness plus dream, we call dream. Consciousness is the screen on which all the pictures come and go. The screen is real; the pictures are mere shadows on it. Because by long habit we have been regarding these three states as real, we call the state of mere awareness or consciousness as the fourth. There is, however, no fourth state, but only one state.

In this connection Bhagavan quoted verse 386 of ‘Paraparakkanni’ of Thayumanavar and said that this so-called fourth state is described as waking sleep or sleep in waking – meaning asleep to the world and awake in the Self.\*

O Supreme of Supremes!  
To remain, free of sleep,  
beyond thoughts’ corruption,  
is this the pure state of grace?  
Pray, speak!†

In the final verse in this section Thayumanavar describes the moment of Self-realisation and some of the experiences that stem from it. Arthur Osborne wrote that this was a verse that Bhagavan particularly liked,‡ but there are no recorded instances of Bhagavan quoting this verse in his replies to devotees.

When overpowered by the vast expanse  
that has neither beginning, middle nor end,

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\* *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11th January, 1946.

† ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 386.

‡ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, p. 61, B. I. publications, 1979.

the truth of non-dual bliss will arise in the mind.  
 Our entire clan will be redeemed.  
 Nothing will be lacking.  
 All our undertakings will prosper.  
 There will be sporting in the company  
 of those wise ones who,  
 like sunrise at the break of day,  
 have known the dawn of grace,  
 where there is neither abundance nor lack.  
 Our nature will become such,  
 that like babies, madmen or ghouls,  
 we should not rejoice,  
 though offered heaven and earth in their entirety.\*

### **The mocking comments of the mind**

... [Khanna] handed Bhagavan a piece of paper on which he had written something.

After reading it Bhagavan said, ‘It is a complaint. He says, “I have been coming to you and this time I have remained nearly a month at your feet and I find no improvement at all in my condition. My *vasanas* are as strong as ever. When I go back, my friends will laugh at me and ask what good my stay here has done.”’

Then, turning to Khanna, Bhagavan said, ‘Why distress your mind by thinking that *jnana* has not come or that the *vasanas* have not disappeared? Don’t give room for thoughts. In the last stanza of ‘Sukavari’ in Thayumanavar the saint says much the same as is written on this paper.’

And Bhagavan made me read the stanza and translate it into English for the benefit of those who did not know Tamil. It goes: ‘The mind mocks me,

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\* ‘Ninaivonru’, verse 7.

and though I tell you ten thousand times, you are indifferent, so how am I to attain peace and bliss?’\*

The translation recorded by Devaraja Mudaliar in *Day by Day with Bhagavan* comes from the second part of the verse. G.V. Subbaramayya has noted<sup>†</sup> that Bhagavan explained the first half of the verse in the late 1930s, although neither the circumstances nor the explanation itself is given.

This particular verse seems to have been one that particularly interested Bhagavan for Devaraja Mudaliar has reported: ‘On one occasion stanzas 8 to 11 of ‘Mandalattin’ and twelve of ‘Sukavari’ [the verse just referred to] were elaborately explained by Bhagavan and were translated into English by me for the benefit of those who did not know Tamil. These stanzas used to be frequently referred to by Bhagavan.’<sup>‡</sup>

In the first half of the ‘Sukavari’ verse the mind of Thayumanavar is complaining to its *jiva*, its spirit or soul, about the division that has sprung up between them.

‘Like yourself [the *jiva*] who are spirit, have not I, the mind,  
and my friend, the prana, always dwelt within the body?  
Long ago someone or other separated us,  
designating us as “insentient” and yourself as “sentient”.  
From the day you heard that, right up to the present day,  
you have unjustly erected a barrier between us and  
suppressed us,  
exercising your oppressive rule.  
What a great task you have accomplished,  
right before our eyes!’

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\* *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 26th June, 1946. In the same work it is stated that Bhagavan also explained this verse to Dr Srinivasa Rao on 22nd November 1945, but the explanation itself was not recorded.

† *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, 1967 ed., p. 49.

‡ *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 54-5, 1992 ed.

When my foolish mind thus grossly abuses me,  
 my heart is scorched and blackened,  
 like beeswax exposed to a leaping flame!  
 Can this be right and proper?  
 Though I have called upon You [God] ten thousand times,  
 you have not taken pity on me, and bestowed your grace.  
 Henceforth, how may happiness ever come to me? Speak!  
 Supreme Godhead,  
 pure and devoid of all attributes!  
 Supernal Light! Ocean of bliss!\*

On the occasion that Devaraja Mudaliar read out and translated the ‘Sukavari’ verse for Khanna’s benefit, there was a further dialogue on this subject, after which Bhagavan quoted three more Thayumanavar verses, the same ones that Mudaliar said Bhagavan had once given a lengthy explanation on:

Then I [Devaraja Mudaliar] said to Khanna: ‘You are not the only one who complains to Bhagavan like this. I have more than once complained in the same way, and I still do, for I find no improvement in myself.’

Khanna replied: ‘It is not only that I find no improvement but I think I have grown worse. The *vasanas* are stronger now. I can’t understand it.’

Bhagavan again quoted the last three stanzas of ‘Mandalattin’ of Thayumanavar, where the mind is coaxed as the most generous and disinterested of givers, to go back to its birthplace or source and thus give the devotee peace and bliss, and he asked me to read out a translation that I had once made.<sup>†</sup>

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\* ‘Sukavari’, verse 12, followed by three lines of the refrain.

† *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 26th June, 1946. The translation that Mudaliar made no longer exists. What follows is a translation by the authors of this article.

Mind, you who evolve from *maya*  
as jewels are wrought from gold!  
If you are freed from your defects  
so that blissful samadhi is attained  
by meditating on [reality] within oneself  
as oneself, by melting within,  
and by making [you] fall away,  
I shall attain redemption.  
No one is as kind to me as you are – no one.  
When I ponder on this, you [the mind]  
are equal to the grace of God.

Amongst those who have taken on bodies  
to experience the [the world],  
be they Brahma, or any of the gods,  
it is true, is it not,  
that for any of them to reject you [the mind],  
and exist without you,  
is impossible, quite impossible.  
Without you, can anything be,  
in this world or the next?  
To vainly label you ‘unreal’ is unjust.  
So I shall praise you as ‘real’ also.  
In order that my wretched state may be ended,  
you must return to the glorious land of your birth.

You who have been my companion  
for many a day, were you to lie dead  
through the enquiry [*vichara*]  
that has separated you from me,  
I should revere that ground with perfect devotion.  
Through the *mauna* Guru who has ruled me  
I will be free from ‘I’ and ‘mine’,  
becoming one with his grace.  
The eight *siddhis*, liberation itself,  
which is a vision delightful to behold,  
shall be mine upon the earth.  
Through you my anxieties shall be ended.

All my interminable wrangling  
 with birth will end in this very birth.  
 For me, the state of *jivanmukti*,  
 which is difficult for anyone to experience,  
 will arise.  
 Oh, Sir [mind]! Will even a cloud  
 or a grove of *karpaka* trees [wish-fulfilling trees]  
 suffice as a comparison to you?  
 Can your greatness be described  
 in the seven worlds, beginning with earth?\*

### **Siddhis, yoga, and religious harmony**

Though Thayumanavar mentioned in the last verse but one that siddhis would come automatically when his mind had, through the grace of his Guru, ceased to function, he generally disapproved of attempts to pursue such powers. Bhagavan mentioned this in the following reply:

One man said that a siddha of Kumbakonam claimed to overcome the defects in Sankara's system which deals only with transcendentalism and not the work-a-day life. One must be able to exercise super-human powers in ordinary life, that is to say, one must be a siddha in order to be perfect.

Sri Bhagavan pointed out a stanza in Thayumanavar which condemns all siddhis.<sup>†</sup>

In the English version of *Talks* the Thayumanavar verse is not specified, but in the Tamil edition, the translator and editor, Viswanatha Swami, states that the following verse is the one that Bhagavan was referring to:

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\*‘Mandalattin’, verses 8-11. The last four verses of ‘Mandalattin’ are given here since Mudaliar has already mentioned earlier in the article that Bhagavan once gave an extensive explanation of all four of them. See *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 54-5, 1992 ed.

† *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1st January 1936, talk no. 122.

To tame a rutting elephant, who has snapped his tethering-post,  
 and to walk him under our control – that is possible.  
 To muzzle a bear, or a fierce tiger – that is possible.  
 To ride upon the back of the incomparable lion – that is possible.  
 To charm snakes, and make them dance – that is possible.  
 To put mercury into a furnace, transform the five base metals,  
 sell them, and live from the proceeds – that is possible.  
 To wander the earth, invisible to everyone else – that is possible.  
 To command the celestials in our own service – that is possible.  
 To remain forever young – that is possible.  
 To transmigrate into another physical body – that is possible.  
 To walk on water, or to sit amidst flames – that is possible.  
 To attain supernatural powers, that know no equal – that  
 is possible.

But the ability to control the mind, and remain still,  
 is very difficult indeed.

God, whose nature is consciousness,  
 who as the reality, impossible to seek,  
 took up his abode within my understanding!  
 Refulgent light of bliss!\*

Thayumanavar did not merely disapprove of the pursuit of siddhis. His criticism extended to extreme ascetic practices, attempts to prolong the lifespan of the body, and methods which aimed to raise the *kundalini* to the *sahasrara*. In the following verse, which Devaraja Mudaliar said Bhagavan occasionally referred to, Thayumanavar asserts that none of these practices by themselves can lead to liberation.

Though we firmly stand upon devotion's path,  
 though we perform *pradakshina* of the broad earth's nine  
 divisions,  
 though we bathe in the ocean, and in the rivers too,  
 though we place ourselves between the rising flames  
 without a thought of thirst or hunger,

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\* 'Tejomayanandam', verse 8.



stopping up the gnawing pangs with water, air and fallen leaves,  
 though we dwell in silence, retreat to lofty mountain caves,  
 though we purify the ten channels which ever endure,  
 though we contain within the sphere known as *somavattam*  
 the inner fire, along with the vital air which rises from the root,  
 tasting thus the nectar that no words can describe,  
 though we practise the acquisition of powerful *siddhis*,  
 to prolong this mere trifle of a body through every aeon  
 of time,

other than through *jnana* can liberation be attained?

Siddhanta Mukti's Primal Lord!

Dakshinamurti, enthroned in glory upon the lofty Siragiri!

Guru, you who are pure consciousness's form!\*

There are a few technical terms in this verse that may need to be explained:

The five fires (*panchakini*) are those amidst which an ascetic performs *tapas* – four at the cardinal points, and the fifth being the sun.

The ten channels are the *ida*, *pingala* and *sushumna nadis*, along with seven lesser-known ones.

The *somavattam*, associated with the moon, is a circular area at the centre of the *sahasrara chakra*, located in the area of the crown of the skull. When the vital breath, originating in the *muladhara* or root chakra, combines with the *kundalini* energy, it rises through all the six chakras until it becomes contained and held in the seventh, the *sahasrara chakra*, the thousand-petalled lotus with the *somavattam* at its centre. At this point a nectar is released through the melting effect of the fiery energy. The yogi, in his state of absorption, is able to feed upon this nectar, and thus remain in this state for long periods. Bhagavan referred to this practice when he said: 'The

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\* 'Chinmayanandaguru', verse 11. Devaraja Mudaliar stated in *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 55, that Bhagavan occasionally referred to this verse.

*yoga marga* speaks of the six centres, each of which must be reached by practice and transcended until one reaches the *sahasrara* where nectar is found and thus immortality.\*

The key line in this verse is the last one in which Thayumanavar asserts, ‘other than through *jnana* can liberation be attained?’, a rhetorical question whose answer is clearly ‘no’. This conclusion and the preceding comments about the pointlessness of pursuing siddhis can both be found in a remarkably similar answer that Bhagavan gave out when he was asked about the relationship between enlightenment and the attainment of siddhis.

Only *jnana* obtained through enquiry can bestow Liberation. Supernatural powers are all illusory appearances created by the power of maya. Self-realisation which is permanent is the only true accomplishment [siddhi]. Accomplishments which appear and disappear, being the effect of maya, cannot be real. They are accomplished with the object of enjoying fame, pleasures, etc. They come unsought to some persons through their karma. Know that union with *Brahman* is the attainment of the sum total of all the siddhis. This is also the state of Liberation [*aikya mukti*] known as union [*sayujya*].†

Thayumanavar and Bhagavan were in agreement that yogic practices alone will not directly result in liberation. Bhagavan has pointed out in several places that its practices can result in bliss, siddhis, and even *nirvikalpa samadhi*, but he also maintained that it is not until the ‘I’ dies in the Heart that *jnana*, true liberation occurs.‡

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\* *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk no. 398.

† *Upadesa Manjari*, section four, answer ten.

‡ See *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk nos. 398 and 474 where Bhagavan expresses his views on these yogic practices in great detail.

Though Bhagavan and Thayumanavar both pointed out the limitations of yogic practices, and though both were sharply critical of people who attempted to attain siddhis, they had a generally tolerant attitude to different religions and their various practices. They knew that they all ultimately resolved themselves into the state of *mauna* in which all such distinctions and differences were rendered invalid. The next quotation on this subject is from Bhagavan, and it is followed by a very similar statement from Thayumanavar.

The doctrines of all religions contradict each other. They wage war, collide with each other, and finally die.

On this battlefield all the religions retreat defeated when they stand before *mauna*, which abides beneficently, sustaining them all.

The rare and wonderful power of *mauna* is that it remains without enmity towards any of the religions.

The many different religions are appropriate to the maturity of each individual, and all of them are acceptable to reality.

Abandoning vain disputation, which only deludes and torments the mind, accept the doctrine of the *mauna* religion, which always remains undisturbed.\*

Shining Supreme!

If we scrutinise all the religions

that look so different,

we find no contradiction in their purpose.

They are all your sport.

Just as all rivers discharge into the sea,

they all end in the ocean of *mauna*†

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\* *Padamalai*, ‘Religions and Religious Knowledge’ chapter, verses 1-5.

† ‘Kallalin’, verse 25. The verse appears in full in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21st November, 1945, and was briefly mentioned in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 547.

The two major competing systems of religious and philosophical thought in South India have, for several centuries, been Vedanta and Saiva Siddhanta. The proponents of each school have been criticising the other in their writings for much of the last thousand years. Bhagavan tended to use the language and philosophical structures of Vedanta when he answered visitors' questions whereas Thayumanavar, in his poems, showed a strong Saiva Siddhanta influence. However, neither was dogmatic about his system since they both knew, from direct experience, that in the experience of the Self all philosophical divisions and distinctions are dissolved. As Thayumanavar wrote:

Since my own actions are forever your own actions,  
and since the 'I'-nature does not exist apart from you,  
I am not different from you.  
This is the state in which Vedanta and Siddhanta  
are harmonised.\*

Bhagavan's own synthesis of the two apparently contradictory philosophies can be found in the following two replies:

**Question:** What is the end of devotion [bhakti] and the path of Siddhanta [i.e., Saiva Siddhanta]?

**Bhagavan:** It is to learn the truth that all one's actions performed with unselfish devotion, with the aid of the three purified instruments [body, speech and mind], in the capacity of the servant of the Lord, become the Lord's actions, and to stand forth free from the sense of 'I' and 'mine'. This is also the truth of what the Saiva Siddhantins call *para-bhakti* [supreme devotion] or living in the service of God [*irai pani nittral*].

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\* 'Paripurananandam', verse 5. *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11th June, 1946.

**Question:** What is the end of the path of knowledge [*jnana*] or Vedanta?

**Bhagavan:** It is to know the truth that the ‘I’ does not exist separately from the Lord [*Isvara*] and to be free from the feeling of being the doer [*kartrtva*, *ahamkara*].\*

## Death and Liberation

**Question:** Is liberation to be achieved before the dissolution of the body or can it be had after death?...

**Bhagavan:** Is there death for you? For whom is death? The body which dies, were you aware of it, did you have it, during sleep? The *body* was not, when you slept. But *you* existed even then. When you awoke you got the body and even in the waking state *you* exist. You existed both in sleep and waking. But the body did not exist in sleep and exists only in waking. That which does not exist always, but exists at one time and not at another, cannot be real. You exist always and you alone are therefore real.

Liberation is another name for you. It is always here and now with you. It is not to be won or reached hereafter. Christ has said, ‘The Kingdom of God is within you,’ here and now. You have no death.†

*Bhagavan then cited some lines from Thayumanavar to illustrate his theme:*

... those whose state of *nishta* [Self-abidance] is permanent will not even entertain the thought that death exists. This is not a thing to be taught to those of little understanding. At the mere mention of it, numerous disputations will ensue. Are not the divine-natured Markandeya and Suka, and the rest of the [great] sages immortals, their minds transcended?

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\* *Spiritual Instruction*, part one, questions nine and ten.

† *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 9th March 1946.

Divine One, to whom

Indra and all the *devas*, Brahma and all the gods,  
sages learned in the *Rig* and other *Vedas*,  
the countless leaders of the celestial hosts,  
the nine principal *siddhas*,  
the Sun, the Moon and the rest of the planets,  
the *gandharvas*, *kinnaras* and all the rest,  
join their palms together in worship!

My Lord, compassion's home, who dance your dance  
beyond the reach of thought, in consciousness's Hall!\*

*Markandeya and Suka are deemed to be immortals, as are all the other sages who have permanently transcended the mind. Some of the commentators on this verse say that all the other beings who are listed after Markandeya and Suka are not immortal, and therefore have to continue to pay obeisance to forms of the divine.*

*It is worth noting that Devaraja Mudaliar noted in his reminiscences<sup>†</sup> that Bhagavan once quoted him a portion of this same verse ('This is not a thing to be taught to those of little understanding. At the mere mention of it, numerous disputations will ensue.') Mudaliar understood this to mean that Bhagavan was occasionally circumspect about giving out some aspects of his teaching to people who were not ready for them because to do so would merely provoke pointless arguments.*

### The real 'I' and the spurious 'I'

*There was once a discussion in the hall about the true meaning of verse ten of Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham which states:*

The body is like an earthen pot, inert. Because it has no consciousness of 'I', and because daily in

\* 'Karunakarakkadavul', verse 7.

† *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 91.

bodiless sleep we touch our real nature, the body is not ‘I’. Then who is this ‘I’? Where is this ‘I’? In the Heart Cave of those that question thus, there shines forth as ‘I’, Himself, the Lord Siva of Arunachala.\*

Dr. Srinivasa Rao asked whether [this stanza] does not teach us to affirm *soham* [repeating ‘I am He’ as a spiritual practice]. Bhagavan explained as follows.

It is said that the whole Vedanta can be compressed into the four words, *deham* [the body], *naham* [I am not the body], *koham* [Who am I?], *soham* [I am He]. This stanza says the same. In the first two lines it is explained why *deham* is *naham*, i.e., why the body is not ‘I’ or *na aham*. The next two lines say, if one enquires *ko aham*, i.e., Who am I?, i.e., if one enquires whence this springs and realises it, then in the heart of such a one the omnipresent God Arunachala will shine as ‘I’, as *sa aham* or *soham*: i.e., he will know ‘That I am,’ i.e., ‘That is “I”’.

In this connection Bhagavan also quoted two stanzas, one from Thayumanavar and the other from Nammazhvar, the gist of both of which is: ‘Though I have been thinking I was a separate entity and talking of “I” and “mine”, when I began to enquire about this “I”, I found *you* alone exist.’†

*This is the Thayumanavar verse:*

O Supreme of Supremes!  
 Searching without searching who this ‘I’ was,  
 soon I found You alone  
 standing as the heaven of bliss,  
 You alone, blessed Lord.‡

*The following morning§ Bhagavan showed Devaraja Mudaliar the written texts of both these verses, and he also*

\* *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 124

† *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 23rd January, 1946.

‡ ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 225.

§ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 24th January, 1946.

*added the following Thayumanavar verse which, in its middle portion, expounds the same theme:*

Though you dwell as space and the other elements,  
 as all the worlds in their tens of millions,  
 as the mountains and the encircling ocean,  
 as the moon, and sun, and all else that is,  
 and as the flood of heaven's grace;  
 and though, as I stand here as 'I',  
 you dwell united with myself,  
 still there is no cessation of this 'I'.  
 And since I go blabbering 'I', 'I',  
 undergoing countless changes,  
 ignorant in spite of knowing all this,  
 will be it be easy to overcome the power of destiny?  
 Is there any means of awakening one,  
 who even before the day has ended,  
 remains, feigning sleep, his eyes tightly closed?  
 What, then, is the way that may be taught?  
 Yet, this vileness in unjust, so unjust.  
 Who is there to whom I might plead my cause?  
 Supreme One, whose form is bliss,  
 whose unique fullness encompasses  
 this universe and that which lies beyond!\*

### ***Mauna and the thought-free state***

Mr Nanavati asked Bhagavan, 'What is the heart referred to in the verse in *Upadesa Saram* where it is said, "Abiding in the heart is the best karma, yoga, bhakti and *jnana*?"'

**Bhagavan:** That which is the source of all, that in which all live, and that into which all finally merge, is the heart referred to **Nanavati:** How can we conceive such a heart?

**Bhagavan:** Why should you conceive of anything? You have only to see wherefrom the 'I' springs.

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\* 'Anandanaparam', verse 7.



**Nanavati:** I suppose mere *mauna* in speech is no good; but we must have *mauna* of the mind.

**Bhagavan:** Of course. If we have real *mauna*, that state in which the mind is merged into its source and has no more separate existence, then all other kinds of *mauna* will come of their own accord, i.e., *mauna* of words, of action and of the mind or *chitta*.

*Bhagavan also quoted in this connection the following from Thayumanavar:\**

O Supreme of Supremes!  
If the pure silence [*suddha mauna*]  
arises within me,  
my mind will be silence,  
my actions and words, all  
will be silence.†

*In Talks Bhagavan mentions that Thayumanavar mentions mauna in many places, but only defines it in one verse. The definition, given in Talks, is that ‘Mauna is said to be that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego’.‡*

*The specific verse is not given, but in the Tamil edition of Talks, Viswanatha Swami identifies it as ‘Payappuli’, verse 14:*

The unique source [*tan*], fullness [*purnam*],  
prevailed within, in my Heart  
so that the ‘I’ which deemed itself  
an independent entity  
bowed its head in shame.  
Conferring matchless bliss,  
consuming my whole consciousness  
and granting me the state of rapture,  
it nurtured in me the condition of *mauna*.  
This being so, what more is there to be said?

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\* *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 29th April 1946.

† ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 276.

‡ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 122.

*This verse, a clear expression of the state that Thayumanavar finally reached, closely parallels the idea contained in Ulladu Narpadu, verse thirty, in which Bhagavan describes how the individual ‘I’ subsides into its source, the Heart, leaving only the perfection of the Self:*

When the mind turns inwards seeking ‘Who am I?’ and merges in the Heart, then the ‘I’ hangs down his head in shame and the one ‘I’ appears as itself. Though it appears as ‘I-I’, it is not the ego. It is reality, perfection, the substance of the Self.\*

*The similarities are so marked, it should come as no surprise that Bhagavan once commented that this was his favourite Thayumanavar verse.† It was included in the Tamil parayana at Ramanasramam, along with the nine verses from ‘Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam’ that have already been given.*

*The subject of silence and the thought-free state came up again after Bhagavan had cited, with great approval, a passage by Gandhi in which the latter had given a description of his own experience of this state:*

Sri Bhagavan referred to the following passage of Gandhiji in *The Harijan* of the 11th instant:

‘How mysterious are the ways of God! This journey to Rajkot is a wonder even to me. Why am I going, whither am I going? What for? I have thought nothing about these things. And if God guides me, what should I think, why should I think? Even thought may be an obstacle in the way of His guidance.

‘The fact is, it takes no effort to stop thinking. The thoughts do *not* come. Indeed, there is no vacuum – but I mean to say that there is no thought about the mission.’

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\* *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Ulladu Narpadu* verse 30, tr. K. Swaminathan.

† *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 122.

Sri Bhagavan remarked how true the words were and emphasised each statement in the extract. Then he cited Thayumanavar in support of the state which is free from thoughts:\*

The state in which you are not,  
that is *nishta* [Self-abidance].  
But, even in that state,  
do you not remain?  
You whose mouth is silent,  
do not be perplexed!  
Although [in that state] you are gone,  
you are no longer there,  
yet you did not go.  
You are eternally present.  
Do not suffer in vain.  
Experience bliss all the time†

*Two days after Bhagavan had cited Thayumanavar to illustrate Gandhi's thought-free experiences, a visitor returned to the subject:*

**Devotee:** Is not what Gandhi describes the state in which thoughts themselves become foreign?

**Bhagavan:** Yes, it is only after the rise of the 'I'-thought that all other thoughts arise. The world is seen after you have felt 'I am'. The 'I'-thought and all other thoughts had vanished for him.

**Devotee:** Then the body sense must be absent in that state.

**Bhagavan:** The body sense is also a thought whereas he describes the state in which 'thoughts do not come'.

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\* *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 646.

† 'Udal Poyyuravu', verse 53. The last line may also be translated as 'You can have bliss. Come!' Bhagavan mentioned two other Thayumanavar verses on this occasion ('Udal Poyyuravu', verse 52 and 'Payappuli' verse 36) but since they feature elsewhere in this article, they are not repeated here.

**Devotee:** He also says, ‘It takes no effort to stop thinking’.

**Bhagavan:** Of course no effort is necessary to stop thoughts whereas one is necessary for bringing about thoughts.

**Devotee:** We are trying to stop thoughts. Gandhiji also says that thought is an obstacle to God’s guidance. So it is the natural state. Though natural, yet how difficult to realise. They say that sadhanas are necessary and also that they are obstacles. We get confused.

**Bhagavan:** Sadhanas are needed so long as one has not realised it. They are for putting an end to obstacles. Finally, there comes a stage when a person feels helpless notwithstanding the sadhanas. He is unable to pursue the much-cherished sadhana also. It is then that God’s power is realised. The Self reveals itself.

**Devotee:** If the state is natural, why does it not overcome the unnatural phases and assert itself over the rest?

**Bhagavan:** Is there anything besides that? Does anyone see anything the Self? One besides is always aware of the Self. So it is always itself.\*

### 33. Bhagavan and Peacocks†

It was about 10 a.m. Bhagavan was in his place in his usual reclining posture. There was quite a large gathering that day. Nobody spoke. The smoke from the agarbathi curled silently and gracefully upwards and away. There walked into Bhagavan’s presence, two peacocks – one white and the other multi-hued. Knowing Bhagavan’s silent wish, the attendant nearby put a handful of grain for each of the visitors. The coloured peacock began to peck away at his ‘prasada’ while the white one, without touching his share, stood watching the other feeding himself with relish. Suddenly he (the white)

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\* *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 647.

† Sri Prasad, *The Call Divine*, January 1955.

flew at the other and drove him away from his food. The one, thus driven, looked up at Bhagavan and one could quite easily feel the appeal and the silent query in the bird's attitude.

Bhagavan smiled and spoke thus to the mischief maker, even as a loving mother might to a mischievous, little son! "Come here. You have your share. Why do you trouble him?". Everyone was intently watching. The white peacock took a few dignified steps towards Bhagavan and gazed at Him with shining eyes. Bhagavan, extending his hand, said softly: "Yes. Eat your share. Leave him alone. Go, Go". Obediently, the white peacock retraced his steps to his share of food, while the other which had, all this time, stood at a distance, came back to his share of the grains. It seemed as if a highly tensed spring had been gently, yet firmly released. Nobody spoke. Silence had become more silent. Everyone, including the peacocks, understood.

This demonstration of pure love and understanding was appealing to one's heart. The incident is noteworthy because one saw in it the Unity of the trainer and the trainee as the unity of the River in the ocean.

### 34. Bhagavan and the Bhagavad Gita\*

It is well known that the *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the main scriptures of the Hindu religion (*Prasthanas Traya*, the threefold authority). It is a universal scripture, a 'Song Divine'. Bhagavan Ramana used to say that the *Gita* and the Bible are one and one should read the *Gita* always (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*). He often used to quote verses from it and explain them in his own inimitable and illuminating way in reply to various questions of seekers. The light that he has thrown on the teaching of the *Gita* is simply unique, extremely clear and very penetrating. This is perhaps because

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\* G.V. Kulkarni, *Ramana Smriti*, 1980.

he lived the scripture in toto and hence had the authority to elucidate it like Bhagavan Krishna or Jñaneswara. He spoke from his plenary, first-hand experience and not from verbal erudition.

Bhagavan was asked by a devotee to give in brief the contents of the *Gita*. He selected forty-two verses and arranged them in an appropriate order to serve as guidance. Another devotee complained that it was difficult to keep all its seven hundred verses in mind and asked if there was not a verse that could be remembered as the gist of the whole *Gita*. Bhagavan immediately mentioned Verse twenty of Chapter ten:

*Aham Atma, Gudakesa, Sarvabhutashayasthitah Aham  
Adischa Madhyam cha bhutanam anta eva cha.*

I am the Self, O Gudakesa, dwelling in the  
Hearts of all beings.

I am the beginning, and the middle and the end  
of all beings.

Another time Bhagavan summarised the purpose of the *Gita* in a reply to a question by a devotee:

**Devotee:** The *Gita* seems to emphasise karma, for Arjuna is persuaded to fight. Krishna Himself set the example by an active life of great exploits.

**Maharshi:** The *Gita* starts by saying that you are not the body, that you are not therefore the *karta* (doer).

D.: What is the significance?

M.: That one should act without thinking oneself to be the actor. The person has come into manifestation for a certain purpose. That purpose will be accomplished whether he considers himself the actor or not.

D.: What is karma yoga?

M.: Karma yoga is that yoga in which the person does not arrogate to himself the functions of being the actor. The actions go on automatically.

D.: Is it the non-attachment to the fruits of action?

M.: The question arises only if there is the actor. It is said throughout that you should not consider yourself the actor.

D.: The *Gita* teaches active life from beginning to end.

M.: Yes, the actorless action. Bhagavan Krishna is an ideal example of such a karma yogi.

Maharshi clarifies it thus:

The Self makes the universe what it is by his Sakti and yet he does not himself act. Krishna says in *Bhagavad Gita*, ‘I am not the doer and yet actions go on’. It is clear from the *Mahabharata* that very wonderful actions were effected by him. Yet He says that He is not the doer. It is like the sun and the world action.

There are certain apparent contradictions in the *Gita* which baffle an ordinary reader. Maharshi in his replies removes such contradictions. In reply to a question he said:

The answers will be according to the capacity of the seeker. It is said in the second chapter of the *Gita* that no one is born or dies; but in the fourth chapter Krishna says that numerous incarnations of His and of Arjuna had taken place, all known to Him but not to Arjuna. Which of these statements is true? Both statements are true, but from different standpoints. Now a question is raised, how can *jiva* rise up from the Self? Only know your real Being; then you will not raise this question. Why should a man consider himself separate? How was he before being born and how will he be after death? Why waste time in such discussions? What was your form in deep sleep? Why do you consider yourself as an individual?

On another occasion a devotee asked Maharshi, “Why does Krishna say, ‘After several rebirths the seeker gains Knowledge and thus knows me?’ There must be evolution from stage to stage.”

Maharshi replied:

How does *Bhagavad Gita* begin? ‘Neither I was not, nor you nor these chiefs, etc. Neither is it born, nor does it die, etc.’. So there is no birth, no death, no present as you

look at it. Reality was, is and will be. It is changeless. Later Arjuna asked Krishna how he could have lived before Aditya. Then Krishna, seeing Arjuna was confounding Him with the gross body, spoke to him accordingly. The instruction is for one who sees diversity. In reality there is neither bondage nor mukti for him or for others from the *jnani's* standpoint. *Abhyasa* (practice) is only to prevent any disturbance to the inherent peace. There is no question of years. Prevent this thought at this moment. You are only in your natural state whether you make *abhyasa* or not.

Here Maharshi refers to his famous dictum, “You are already realised.”

People generally consider Krishna as a personal God. They overemphasise the physical form of the Lord. According to them He is a mythological God of the Hindus; and thus they miss the real teaching of the *Gita*. What does Krishna say about Himself throughout the *Gita*? Bhagavan clearly removes the doubt and explains the real nature of Krishna. He points out even the limitations of the cosmic form shown by Him to Arjuna, as described in the eleventh chapter.

Once a devotee said, “There is a very remarkable girl of eleven at Lahore. She says she can call upon Krishna twice and remain conscious, but if she calls Him a third time she becomes unconscious and remains in trance for ten hours continuously.”

Maharshi commented, “So long as you think that Krishna is different from you, you call upon Him. Falling into trance denotes the transitoriness of the samadhi. You are always in samadhi; that is what should be realised. God vision is only the vision of the Self objectified as the God of one's own faith. Know the Self.

Another devotee asked, “What is *visvarupa*?”

M.: It is to see the world as the Self of God. In the *Bhagavad Gita* God is said to be various things and beings and also the whole universe. How to realise it and see it so? Can one see one's Self?



D.: Is it then wrong to say that some have seen it?

M.: It is true in the same degree as you are. Realisation implies perfection. When you are limited, your knowledge is thus imperfect. In *visvarupa darshan*, Arjuna is told to see whatever he desired and not what was presented before him. How can that darshan be real?

On another occasion a devotee asked, “Is *Divya chakshuh* (divine sight) necessary to see the glory of God? This physical eye is the ordinary *chakshuh*.”

M.: Oh! I see, you want to see the million sun-splendour and the rest of it.

D.: Can we not see the glory as million sun-splendour?

M.: Can you see the single sun? Why do you ask for millions of suns?

D.: It must be possible to do so by divine sight.

M.: All right. Find Krishna and the problem is solved.

D.: Krishna is not alive.

M.: Is that what you have learnt from the *Gita*? Does he not say that He is eternal? Of what are you thinking, His body?

D.: He taught others while alive. Those around Him must have realised. I see a similar living Guru.

M.: Is *Gita* then useless after He withdrew His body? Did He speak of His body as Krishna? ‘Never was I not, etc.’ Later Bhagavan said that divine sight means Self-luminosity. The full word means the Self.

In this dialogue Bhagavan has very logically and mercilessly removed the common ignorance about the real nature of Krishna and has clearly indicated Him to be the all-pervading Self, residing in the Heart.

The three yogas, karma, bhakti and *jnana* (which includes dhyana) given in the *Gita* are meant for seekers of different temperaments, says Maharshi. Karma yoga is meant for men of active tendencies. It is calculated to eliminate the idea of doership in the seeker. Bhakti yoga is meant for men of powerful emotions. It dissolves the ego in supreme

devotion for God. *Jnana* yoga is meant for men of reason and understanding capable of Self-enquiry. When the mind wanders, it should be controlled and brought back to the Self. It eliminates the individual ‘I’, the spurious ego. This is the direct path and all other yogas ultimately lead to this. When the false ego is understood and hence removed, the Reality shines in all its glory automatically. To understand this truth and experience it here and now is the purpose of the teaching of the *Gita*, says Bhagavan.

In the words of Saint Jnaneswara, “It is easy to make the earth golden, to create great mountains of desire-yielding jewels, to fill the seven seas with nectar, but it is difficult to indicate the secret of the meaning of the *Gita*”. Bhagavan Ramana has definitely done it. No wonder it is identical with his main teaching, “Either know who you are or surrender”.

From the great Adi Sankara down to Dr. Ranade and Swami Swaroopanand, many scholars and sages have written works on the *Gita*. In this galaxy, Bhagavan Ramana’s contribution to the *Gita*, though couched in a few words, is remarkable and true to the original. It is at once universal and beyond the categories of time and space, and yet practical in the everyday life of man.

Let us pray to him to shower his grace and blessings on us all to help us understand this truth and experience it here and now. A thousand pranams to him!

### 35. Bhagavan is Bhagavan\*

**S**ri Ramana has been hailed as Gem (Spiritual Teacher or Master) by people professing various creeds and cults throughout the world. It must however be remembered that he has never given ‘Upadesh’ (initiation) to any person and

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\* Sri G.V. Subbaramayya, M.A. (HONS.), Nellore, *The Call Divine*, October 1954.

never designated any one as his ‘*Sishya*’ (disciple). All of us who revere and adore him might call ourselves his Bhaktas (devotees). But no one can claim to be his ‘*Sishya*’ (disciple) in the sense of imbibing and carrying on his particular teaching and tradition. The reason is obvious. Sri Ramana has been a unique phenomenon in the realm of Spirituality. He has not initiated any school of thought or philosophy. While he clearly and sympathetically expounded the different faiths and systems of philosophy and gave practical help and guidance to spiritual aspirants of various sects and religions, he never identified himself with any one of them. As a true *Jnani*, he was all-comprehensive but transcendental, universal but essentially inimitable. He was above every limitation. While all creeds and cults existed in him, he did not exist in them. So, it is impossible to identify Sri Ramana with any one creed or doctrine, however lofty.

As so many staunch adherents of several creeds and doctrine cherish devotion to Sri Ramana, it is perhaps to be expected that they would look upon him as the best exponent and exemplar of their respective creed or doctrine. Sri Ramana has been praised and addressed under various names and incarnations. Worshippers of different Gods or Sages have seen in him their favourite God or Sage. Sri Ramana has not repudiated any of them, because he as *Jnani* sees nothing other than the Self. Out of his overflowing Grace, he has accepted the homage fervently offered under any name or form. Sri Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni has praised Sri Ramana in many beautiful verses as the incarnation of Sri Subrahmanya or Skanda. One devotee hailed him as Sri Dakshinamurti, one as Sri Sankara, another as Sri Jnanasambandar and still another as Lord Venkateswara. This writer acclaimed twice as Lord Krishna incarnate. Sri Ramana has not denied any of them.

At the same time, he has disclaimed for himself all name and form. Before Self-realisation at seventeen, he bore the name ‘VENKATARAMAN’ which his parents had given him. It was Sri Kavyakantha that started calling him “BHAGAVAN

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI”, and other devotees followed suit. We read in the Scriptures that ‘Maharshi’ means the chief of those who have realised the Truth and can help others to do the same, and that ‘Bhagavan’ means one who possesses ‘Aiswarya’ (Divine Power), ‘Dharma’ (Righteousness), ‘Yashas’(Renown). ‘Sri’ (Affluence), ‘Jnana’ (Knowledge) and ‘Vairagya’ (Detachment) in parted measure. ‘Ramana’ sounds more euphonious and Telugu-like than ‘Venkataraman’. Possibly Sri Kavyakantha was impelled by the above ideas to coin the name which has become universally current. In conformity with the *Sastraic* injunction against the utterance of Guru’s name, the *Ashramites* and intimate devotees used to address Sri Ramana as ‘Bhagavan’ only.

This title ‘Bhagavan’ would have a two-fold reaction upon strangers. In common parlance it means ‘Supreme God’. So, the stranger would first think that the devotees are perpetrating a gross exaggeration in calling a man that, however great as ‘Bhagavan’. When the stranger learns that the term ‘Bhagavan’ has come to be used as an honorific title like “His Holiness” or “His Worship” and has been applied to Maharshis like Valmiki and Vyasa, he gets reconciled to its application to Sri Ramana.

On the other hand, Sri Ramana’s detachment to these names and titles was so complete that he would join at times in reciting the poems of praise to any of those names, as if they did not relate to himself at all. After Self-realisation, he never signed himself under any name. When people occasionally approached him for a message, he would decline, saying that any message had to go with some name and he had no name. They found it hard to believe him while he spoke this fact.

Leaving the names aside, who or what was Sri Ramana? Who could tell except Sri Ramana himself. Fortunately for us, Sri Ramana like Sri Krishna revealed himself in an incident that happened forty years ago. One day, in the Virupaksha cave, when Sri Ramana had gone out, Amritanadha Yatindra wrote on a slip of paper a verse in Malayalam saying that his

heart was consumed with the desire to know who this Ramana of Arunachala was. Was he Hari, Sivaguru, Vararuchi or some great sage? The scribe placed the slip on Sri Ramana's seat and went away. Sri Ramana on his return noticed it and wrote on its back another verse in Malayalam replying as follows:

“Ramana of Arunachala is but the Over-Self sporting as Awareness in the cavity of the lotus-shaped heart of all Jivas (living beings) beginning with Hari. The truth of it will become patent to the eye of Knowledge as it opens when with perfect earnestness you enter the inner recess of the Heart where He reigns supreme.”

This stanza in its Tamil version has become part of the daily ‘*Parayana*’ (recitation) in the Ashram. So here is the revelation that Sri Ramana is none other than the Supreme Self. Who could say it in so many words except the Supreme Self called as Sri Krishna, Sri Ramana or by any other name.

One morning, Sri Ramana himself approvingly quoted to this writer a Tamil verse of Sri Muruganar which utters the following warning:

“Like the cock that throws out a diamond taking it for a pebble, you too may slight the Supreme Self named Ramana of Arunachala, mistaking him for a mere fellow-man. Therefore, beware.”

One evening, in the Jubilee Hall, Sri Ramana was repeatedly pressed by a young French visitor to declare his favourite verse in *Bhagavad Gita*. After long parrying, Sri Ramana cited the verse in the tenth canto:

“I am the Self, O Gudakesa, dwelling in the Heart of every being; I am the beginning and the middle and likewise the end of all beings.”

This stanza Sri Ramana had also included in the edition of his “Selections from *Bhagavad Gita*.”

Such categorical declaration by Sri Ramana of who or what he is must be reckoned the greatest boon to the world. It is like Lord Krishna's ‘*Viswarupa Darsanam*’ (Revelation of the Universal Self) to Arjuna. It teaches us the right attitude

in which we should approach Sri Ramana. It puts our mind on the alert not to mistake him for any individual being-God or man. For that would be doing wrong to Sri Ramana and pulling on ourselves down spiritually. Sri Ramana was not a mere ‘Guru’ (Teacher) in the ordinary sense of the term. Nor was he a mere saint or sage or prophet or founder of a new faith or cult. It would be doing him injustice to tie him up to any creed or doctrine however exalted in the eye of its observers.

The simple fact is this. Sri Ramana is BHAGAVAN in the truest sense of the term, not with inverted commas. To put it better Sri Bhagavan, out of his infinite Grace, incarnated as Sri Ramana to proclaim, more by silence than by speech, more by practical living than by theoretical instruction, the Truth of the Supreme Self and how to realise the Supreme Self. And as they say ‘paramountcy is paramount’, BHAGAVAN is BHAGAVAN.

### 36. Nine Stray Verses

#### **Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi**

These verses were written at different times and having been collected were arranged in this order by Bhagavan:

1. ‘Tis the one syllable that shines as Self in Heart for e’er;  
That can this syllable write down who is there anywhere?
2. For those not firm in Consciousness which is of “I” the source,  
Than *Japa* tracing whence starts sound is far the better course.
3. This excreta-making body for Self he who mistakes  
Is worse than one who, born a pig, for food excreta takes.

4. Incessant search for Self the love supreme of God we call,  
For He alone as Self abides within the Heart of all.
5. What introverted mind calls Peace, outside as power is shown:  
Those who have reached and found the Truth their Unity  
have known.
6. He who's contented with his lot, from jealousy is free;  
Balanced in affluence and mishap; not bound by action he.
7. By him alone who's saved himself can other folk be freed;  
The help of others is as if the blind the blind would lead.
8. Question and answer are of speech, duality their sphere;  
Impossible in Monism to find them anywhere.
9. Nor creation nor destruction, bond nor freedom-wish is,  
Nor Sadhana nor Siddha. Of all the final truth this.

### **37. Light on the Path\***

**T**he technique of the spiritual path advocated by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi is well known to be the path of Self-enquiry, though Bhagavan often directed particular aspirants to other paths, mainly devotion. It may be helpful to seekers to know about the experience of one who has tried to follow the path of Self-enquiry for some years.

Though I have always been vitally concerned with religion, the position I had come to in middle age was one of agnosticism. I had totally lost faith in the Christian dogma which had been taught to me as a child. The nearly one hundred denominations of Christianity nauseated me. All external forms of religion I held in utter contempt as the

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\* I.S. Varghese, *The Mountain Path*, July 1965.

domain of old women and fools. It was at this time that I accidentally read Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*. This book produced a deep impression on me. I re-read it carefully, and some sections I read a large number of times, and found that I was on very shallow ground.

Being trained in the modern scientific method it had been my outlook that nothing is knowable beyond the things experienced by the senses. The very first fruit of Self-enquiry, after the practice had proceeded for a few months was a total change of this attitude, and the conviction grew more and more that there is a realm of reality which I would call the realm of the Spirit. This conviction was very strong during the periods of meditation when the mind was quietened. During other times the mind tried to take revenge on this assault of its domain and tried to reassert its supremacy, especially by suggesting doubts about the validity of this conviction. To my scientifically trained mind this took the form of a persistent query "Cannot this conviction itself be an illusion?" Further meditation on the theme "To whom does this illusion appear?" reduced the frequency of this assault. I now realise that this is a doubt that must last so long as the mind exists.

Another aspect of Self-enquiry that became apparent after some months of practice was the assurance of being taken care of by some Higher Power. There was a feeling of power all around, but always subtle power. In very complex situations totally unexpected solutions have automatically appeared. Some experiences which may be classed as miraculous have also come unbidden. It is not relevant to discuss these here. In short, I could personally testify to the findings of one of the earliest of Bhagavan's disciples, F.H. Humphreys:

"Though it takes years to find that 'That' (the Self), the result of this concentration will be seen in four or five months' time – in all sorts of unconscious clairvoyance, in peace of mind, in power to deal with troubles, in power all round, yet always unconscious power." (Osborne.)



Still a further fruit of Self-enquiry was the total change of attitude to people and events. As Bhagavan told Paul Brunton “When you proceed with this enquiry your attitude to people and events will change.” I was particularly wonder-struck at the disappearance of the hostility I had towards certain persons, whom I had counted as my enemies. I had never thought that this was possible or even desirable. But now I found that instead of my previous interpretation of the actions of these ‘enemies’ as deliberate and calculated to harm me, I began to realise that they were acting according to their lights and their nature, and no other course of action was possible for them. With this disappearance of hostility, a thing I had not at all bargained for happened. I found that my ‘enemies’ were now becoming less hostile to me. Actually, after a period, the chief of them got quite reconciled to me, and went out of his way to help me on a number of occasions. It confirmed the findings of many spiritual masters that the only thing that has to be attended to and changed is oneself, and all else will follow. For me, it also confirmed the aphorism in the Yoga Sutras “When non-violence is fully established, all beings discard their hostility in his (the aspirant’s) presence.” (Yoga Sutras, 2-35).

An aversion to the eating of non-vegetarian food began to manifest itself only after a period of some years. It was to all appearances sudden. I had developed a distaste for beef much earlier, but fish and eggs continued to be indispensable items. It was at this time that I read R.L. Stevenson’s *Travels in the South Seas*. The chapter on cannibalism and meat eating in general affected me powerfully. And I found that I could no longer relish non-vegetarian dishes. It was rather hard at first to enjoy a vegetarian meal. But by and by I felt quite at home among vegetarian dishes. I must here state that incidentally my general health improved, and some digestive complaints I used to have disappeared altogether.

One of the most salutary changes in my attitude to things in general has been a growing capacity to treat so many

complex situations with equanimity and without being unduly perturbed by them. This I sense to be due to the growing inward certainty about the course of events not being under our control at all and the conviction that we are only infinitesimal functionaries carrying out the behest of the Supreme One. And I have found that many complex situations have resolved themselves without any interference on my part.

Another thing that has changed has been the clinging to personal possessions. The tyranny of the world diminishes in exact proportion to our indifference to its value to us. In the last resort, when one becomes like a ‘fakir’ (one who possesses nothing and desires nothing) one is free of the world and the world has no hold on one. All our apprehensions, fear, planning and scheming are based on our overvaluation of the worth of worldly things, and the result of our considering ephemeral things of permanent value. If a man grows to the stature of a ‘fakir’, he is free of all fears and apprehensions, as the phenomenal world does not bind him. He is indeed free in the most comprehensive sense of the word and moves as a feather carried on the wings of the wind. He is indeed the *jivanmukta* – the one who has attained freedom while yet in the body. We are all treading the Path to that Beatific State.

May the Grace of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi be with all who read this.

### **38. Bhagavan Sri Ramana – As I Knew Him\***

**R**amana is the Self of all. What one sees, what one bears, what one speaks or does anything is guided by His presence. None can do anything without His guidance. He is speechless and actionless; yet by mere presence of His, one is able to do anything he likes. One’s very life has its root in Him. He is eternal and all pervasive. Every activity of all

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\* Swami Abhedananda, Proddatur – *The Call Divine*, January 1955.

beings takes its source from Ramana. The knowledge infused by Lord Buddha is that of Ramana. The mysterious miracles caused by Lord Christ were with the Divine help of Ramana. Lord Gaurarga's matchless self-surrender was to realise Ramana, otherwise called Lord Krishna. Every trance of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is plunging himself on the Divine Nectar of Ramana or the Supreme Mother. The teachings and preachings of Swami Vivekananda are about Ramana only. The inimitable self-sacrifice of Mahatma Gandhi is to reach Ramana or to get himself merged in Him. Dissemination of knowledge by Swami Sivanandaji of Rishikesh and the inspired talks of Sri Swami Rajeswaranandaji of Madras are of Ramana. Blessings of late Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Swamiji of *Sringeri Mutt* conferring speech to the mute and ability to walk to the lame, were by the grace of Ramana. Every action of mine, yours and others has Ramana's guidance. All the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas etc., speak of Ramana or show the path to realise Him. All the sciences of the East or the West said to have been invented are only discoveries ever existing in Ramana. The knowledge, action or desire arise from Ramana. Nothing exists without Ramana. Nothing existed without Ramana. Nothing will ever exist without Ramana's presence; whatever observed by the naked eye or heard by the human ear becomes insignificant when one closely follows Ramana's magnificent teachings with intuitional vision. Let His teachings to the mankind take their roots deep in the bottom of one's heart and get well nourished by ever remembering the name of Sri Ramana which is Brahman of the Upanishads, *Paramatman* of the Yogis and God of others. Ramana alone exists. There is only one Ramana who resides in all things and all beings. *Sarvam Ramanamayam Jagat*. All are Ramana – the one Truth.

### 39. Arunachala! The Spiritual Axis of the World\*

*Reading the following extract from A Sadhu's Reminiscences, by Sadhu Arunachala (Major A.W. Chadwick), it would appear that Bhagavan was quite certain about a corresponding holy hill exactly opposite the globe to Arunachala. Major Chadwick writes:*

“He used to say that Arunachala was the top of the spiritual axis of the earth. ‘There must,’ he said, ‘be another mountain corresponding to Arunachala at exactly the opposite side of the globe, the corresponding pole of the axis.’ So certain was he of this that one evening he made me fetch an atlas and see if this was not correct. I found, according to the atlas, the exact opposite point came in the sea about a hundred miles off the coast of Peru. He seemed doubtful about this. I pointed out that there might be some island at this spot or a mountain under the sea. It was not until some years after Bhagavan’s passing that a visiting Englishman had a tale of a spot, supposed to be a great secret-power centre, in the Andes somewhere in this latitude. Later I found that though a centre had certainly been started, it had failed. Since then I have been told of another person who is practising meditation in solitude in the region of the Andes in Ecuador. So it does appear as though there were some strange attraction about that part of the globe. The earth is not an exact sphere and maps are not so accurate as all that, so we are unable to pin it down to any definite point. It is quite possible that more is going on in that part of the world than we know and this would fit in well with what Bhagavan said. However, I could never discuss the matter with Bhagavan, as it was not until many years after his passing that I had any indication

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\* Major Chadwick and Ravi Iyer, ‘The Maharshi’ newsletter, Mar/Apr. 2003.

that anything of this sort was happening in those parts. I had many years ago travelled extensively in that country but had never seen anything which would lead me to think that there might be important spiritual centres there.”

*Following the thread of Major Chadwick's research, Dr. Ravi Iyer of Virginia writes about his investigation into Machu Picchu, an ancient, sacred mountain in Peru.*

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi always insisted that the Holy Hill Arunachala was the spiritual axis of the world, even in a physical sense, similar to the geographical North Pole, with a South Pole axis. So strongly did he maintain the view that another holy hill existed on the opposite side of the globe to Arunachala – which was itself remarkable since he normally did not take very rigid positions except on matters concerning the Self and the Heart – that he once made a devotee pull out a world atlas and look for a similar mountain opposite to Arunachala. The only mention we have of this endeavour was that the search indicated a spot on the continental shelf beneath the Pacific Ocean immediately off the coast of Peru. No further effort seems to have been spent after this, though it appears that Bhagavan may not have supported the conclusion of that research, since he seemed convinced that a land-based mountain existed at the other end of this “spiritual axis”.

The Latitude/longitude Coordinates of Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai) are: 12n13, 79e04

Recently I came across an article about a place in the high Andean mountains of Peru that is reputed to be a site of great spiritual force, called Machu Picchu. Machu Picchu was discovered by Yale archeologist Hiram Bingham in 1911, and is the site of an ancient Inca temple city. This city appears to have evaded discovery by the marauding armies of the

Spanish Conquistadors, yet it represents one of the immense mysteries of the Inca civilisation. It appears the Machu Picchu Mountain itself was known as sacred to the Incas from a time before their own civilisation, since the Incas speak of the mountain as the “Ancient One,” who preceded the civilisation of their ancestors.

There are several striking parallels between the Machu Picchu site and the Sakti culture. The Incas worshipped Machu Picchu as the manifestation of the Divine Mother Goddess of the Universe. They referred to Her as “Paachamama,” a name that bears a striking similarity to the name “Pachaiamman” used for Parvathi in South Indian shrines. [In the early 1900s, the Maharshi spent many months at the Pachaiamman Temple at the foot of the Hill, in the town of Tiruvannamalai.] The architecture of the temple city was astrologically and astronomically determined. Various points of the city serve as a kind of giant sextant or observatory from where specific constellations and celestial objects can be plotted and observed. A closer look at the topology of the city reveals a striking resemblance to the *Sri Chakra*, the Meru architectural topology that characterizes Indian Sakti shrines.

On the psychic plane, multiple individuals with siddhic/ occult capacities have separately asserted on visiting Machu Picchu that the city is a place where the feminine aspect of the Universe is especially palpable.

Lastly, the Latitude/longitude coordinates of Machu Picchu are: 13s07, 72w34. While the geographical coordinates are not exactly opposite of those of Arunachala, it would be unreasonable to expect it would be exact since the earth is not a precise sphere.

I share this with the general community of Ramana bhaktas as an item of spiritual and historical interest. While ultimately there is nothing but the Self, as long as the manifested world is our framework of reference then we will

be confronted by the dual pairs of balancing opposites. There can be no Siva without Sakti, and vice versa.

### **References & Notes:**

The URL to the astrodienst website for latitude-longitude determinations is: <http://www.astro.com/cgi/aq.cgi?lang=e>  
The global coordinates for Tiruvannamalai and Machu Picchu are as follows:

Tiruvannamalai: 12n13, 79e04

Machu Picchu: 13s07, 72w34

If you do a precise reversal of Tiruvannamalai's coordinates you will indeed fall off the coast of Peru. You can confirm this by going to the following website and entering the precise reverse coordinate of Tiruvannamalai: <http://www.fourmilab.ch/earthview/vlatlon.html> (The site shows a satellite view. Make sure you are viewing earth from a 10 km height).

Regarding information on Machu Picchu, check out:  
[sacredsites.com](http://www.sacredsites.com) Machu Picchu

<http://www.he.net/~mine/inca/> [stale as of Jun-2009]  
Machu Picchu Crown Jewel In The Clouds – This site had the Meru like (Sri Chakra architecture of the city)  
[ifp.com://MachuPicchu](http://ifp.com://MachuPicchu)

#### 40. Bhagavan Sri Ramana: His Marvellous Love\*

“He who has got into the Grace of the GURU will never be forsaken even as the prey which has entered the jaws of the tiger will never be given up,” said Sri Bhagavan. Has the love of a master ever been expressed in terms stronger than these? Sri Bhagavan’s love was indeed marvellous in measure and extent, transcending space and time.

His love was equal to all, regardless of differences in caste, colour, creed, culture, position and the like. His warm welcome, usually expressed in a genial smile, extended to all who came to visit him. He made kind enquiries, now and then, of their welfare, comforts at the Ashram and sometimes, even of apparently insignificant matters, out of pure Love. All had easy access to him without any introduction or intermediary. He listened to their tales of sorrow with sympathy and gave them the needed comfort and courage to face their trials. Experience has it that many who went to him had their troubles diminished, if not completely cleared. Unexpressed anxieties were dispelled, and untold problems solved. The beauty of all such things is the silent and unostentatious way they occurred without the others knowing about them. It was quite a familiar sight to see Sri Bhagavan caressing a babe resting on his lap. He never took anything which could not be shared with those about him. And in the way he moved with them, there was not a tinge of patronage, a sense of superiority or anything of the kind. He sat with all and took his meal with all. No special dish for him at any time.

His brief conversations included amazing details of his early Sadhana up the hill, absorbing anecdotes about his animal children, humorous remarks about men and things and profound truths about the mystery of life, His master-

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\* V. Venkataramier, B.A., L.T., Madras, *The Call Divine*, February 1953.



mind observed our moods, straight struck home with thought-provoking and soul-lifting words, that had the immediate and almost magical effect of lifting us from our depression. Our mental weakness would disappear in due course.

The phenomenal love of Sri Bhagavan extended not only to his human children, but to all creatures who came in contact with him. The cows and the calves of the Ashram would go straight to him, and receive, as if of right, his love in the shape of fruits, sweets and gentle stroke on their bodies. His caressing them was something bewitching and they seemed so delighted with it. The dogs also had their share of his love in no small measure. A remarkable instance I shall relate here. A disciple of Sri Bhagavan had brought a dog with him. It looked very bright and striking, with Kumkum glistening on its forehead. It was not attracted to food of any kind, as would naturally be expected of an animal, but was almost all the time gambolling at his feet in sheer joy. This rapturous scene set me thinking rather vigorously, and wondering what might be the reason.

Late that night when all alone with Sri Bhagavan, he voluntarily said, referring to the dog that “He was an advanced soul who had put on that skin and that is why he was not eager about his food.’ On hearing this, I was speechless with emotion. His love has created tombs for his departed canine children in the Ashram premises itself. The deer and the peacock also have enjoyed the plentifulness of love. Of all these, monkeys have, it appears, had the greatest share of his affection. I am told that they formed his body-guard during his rambles on the hill in earliest days. His moving anecdotes about their love and gratitude would make us blush with shame at the poor stock of the noble qualities in us humans. Even of the proverbially fierce leopard, he had a good word when he said that it made a “gentle” growl and left, while referring to its visit at the Skandasramam high up the hill, years ago. The enthralling story of Sri Bhagavan’s animal children reveals our callousness and density to their

real selves, which his transcendent love alone was capable of sensing.

The potency of Sri Bhagavan's love transcends space and time. His disciples the world over have experienced it and testified to it. To those who have known him well, this is a patent truth beyond argument or discussion. Instances of immediate response to remote calls are too numerous to relate. Something good you wish for is granted, sometimes, the very moment, wherever you may happen to be. Bhagavan, it is stated, used to say during his last days, "They say I am dying, I am going away. Where can I go? I am not going away. I shall be here."

Sceptics might say that it was just a word of consolation from him to those dear ones gathered about him in intense anxiety and nothing more. Assuredly not so. Scriptures say that it is the gross body alone that dies, and that the soul being unborn is eternal. The lives of saints of all creeds prove this fact. The great ones live more dynamically, on being freed from the limitations of the flesh. Why then doubt Sri Bhagavan's assuring words to us? They are literal truth. I will quote here his words at a leave taking by me after a fairly long stay at the Ashram. Said He, "You say you are going home, where are you going? Where can you go? Your body may go here and there. But, really, all your going and coming are only here (meaning himself), even as the pictures in the cinema are only on the screen. You are always here." These profound words uttered by him with an unforgettable smile have proved literally true. To get away from His Infinite Self, any time or place is well-nigh impossible.

## 41. Bhagavan is Everywhere\*

The most wonderful consequence that comes from being aware of Bhagavan's presence is the realisation that he is accessible everywhere. As we go through life like trapeze artists at the whim of fate it is reassuring to know that the safety net is always there to catch us if we fall. How else can one explain the unmistakable experience of Bhagavan's Grace regardless of wherever we may be in the world? Such incidents are so common, be it in the waking state or the dream world, that it no longer surprises us but confirms his omnipresence. The implication is that there are no barriers in time and space to what we call the presence of Bhagavan. That presence is ever available like the very air we breathe.

There is an interesting discussion about Bhagavan's pervasiveness which gives us some idea of how we may boost the frequency of these surprising epiphanies:

“Siva Mohan Lal asked Bhagavan, ‘When I concentrate here in Bhagavan's presence, I am able to fix my thoughts on the Self easily. But in my home it takes a long time and much trouble to do so. Now why should it be so, especially as I feel convinced that Bhagavan is everywhere and is my *antaryami*? [indweller; inner guide].’ He continued, ‘It must of course be so. Though we are told that God is everywhere, are we not also told that he is more manifest in some objects or places than in others, e.g., in temples, and images or avatars?’

“Bhagavan said, ‘Ask Muruganar, who is here. He has sung a song where he says Ramanasramam is not simply here for him, but everywhere.’ Thereupon Muruganar read out the following stanza from *Ramana Devamalai* [which translated means]:

“‘Because (by His grace) the mind has attained quiescence and remains calm everywhere as it used to remain

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\* Christopher Quilkey, ‘Editorial’, *Mountain Path*, October 2015

at Ramanasramam, wherever I may go in this world it is to me Ramanasramam, to which even devas go with keen desire.’

“In other words, Ramanasramam is *chidakasa* which is everywhere and to which we gain access by killing the mind.

“Bhagavan added, ‘Time and place really do not exist. Even in the radio we have a hint of this truth. We have Hyderabad here. What is sung there, we hear here at the same time as it is sung there. Where is time and place?’\* ”

We tend to assume that Bhagavan has some type of form that can be defined by size and density, even though we have been told again and again that Bhagavan was not to be confused with the physical body we called Ramana Maharshi. He never was and is still not that body which expired some sixty-five years ago!

Though we pay lip-service to the fact that Bhagavan is no longer present in a physical body we still associate him with a form we can relate to. We look at Bhagavan’s photo and this brings us a measure of calm and reassurance. We stand before his samadhi and it fills us with peace and well-being. Is this all there is or have we yet to understand something fundamentally deeper which the normal mind cannot comprehend?

There is nothing wrong with our approach because it is much easier to personalise our relationship with Bhagavan rather than consider the *nirguna* or formless aspect of his presence. Bhagavan is available in whatever aspect can bridge the gap of ignorance we believe separates us. He can be a father, a confidante, a friend, an older brother, a forbidding authority. It all depends on our attitude, which with time and maturity changes and becomes more refined.

What is clear from the above anecdote is that within the space of Ramanasramam there is a chid *akasa* (space of awareness) which draws us inward. It is an unforgettable

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\* Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2006, p.41-2, 21-11-45 Afternoon.

experience. Like a seed once planted it will grow according to how much it is nurtured by our sadhana. One day, through the Grace of Bhagavan, it will swallow us till we know no difference between our inner and outer dimensions, nor will we discover any external difference between the tranquil space at Arunachala and the turbulence of New York city.

Whether we are fully aware of it or not, the inner compulsion of our heart is to reside in that spaceless and timeless awareness. Once tasted it is never forgotten. It overrides all other impulses. It is an almighty impersonal wave that we ignore at our peril and yearn to experience and make our own.

If we keep our minds fixed in one-pointed awareness using the remembrance of Bhagavan, activities will still go on and their ultimate outcome will not affect us. It is important to remember that we are not the doer, things happen. That power, by whatever name we call it, which created this world and brought us into existence will see that our destiny is fulfilled.\*

We may pretend we are masters of our destiny but there is a higher and unseen force which knows and does otherwise. We may as well try and stop the wind for all our vain attempts to control the unstoppable.

Again, what we can do is fix our minds and hearts on Bhagavan in whatever shape or form or *bhava* (attitude) suits us best. With practice we can overcome the *pramada* (wilful forgetfulness) that makes us think we are separate. Our devotion is answered though not necessarily in the form or result we imagined. That our sorrow is lessened and our

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\* “Two birds, companions [who are] always united, cling to the self-same tree. Of these two, the one eats the fruit and the other looks on [as a witness] without eating. On the self-same tree, a person immersed [in the sorrow of the world] is deluded and grieves on account of his helplessness. When he sees the other, the Lord who is worshipped and his greatness, he becomes freed from sorrow.” *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.1.1-2. *The Principal Upanishads*, S. Radhakrishnan, Harper Collins, Delhi, 1994. p.686.)

doubts and confusion cleared to the point where they seem quite irrelevant in the face of an overwhelming sense of peace, is evident to all who enter the ambit of Arunachala Ramana.

On a purely physical level we know that the speed of light is some 186,000 miles per second. We also know that the speed of thought is faster than light. What if there is something which is faster than thought? How to think of it, or imagine it? We cannot because our mind is an instrument of thought. But what if there is ‘something’ which transcends all sense of difference?

Bhagavan said repeatedly that he and the Self are one and the same and our mistake is to identify him with a body and mind. Let us accept for a moment that what he says is true and not just nod our heads blindly and pay lip service to this insight. If Bhagavan is not the body or the mind then who is ‘he’? And if we are to believe him, that he and we are one and the same, who then are we?

Consider. We cannot know it with our physical bodies, that is, wherever we travel we will not find it. We cannot know it with our minds because whatever we conceive with thought is partial and transitory. Thought, to extend a physical analogy, is not fast enough to catch it. Then how can we ‘catch’ it? It is not a thought. And this is the clue: ‘we’ cannot catch it. It catches us.

We think we can do it and that is our delusion.

What we can do is develop one-pointed attention for ‘it’ to find and catch us. By this practice we learn that the one absolute essential of sadhana is to be still (*summa iru*).

That is as far as we can go with our minds. It is here that surrender or the practice of self-enquiry keeps us quiet. Their purpose is to purify our minds. We are creating the conditions for Grace.

Someone asked Bhagavan to bless them upon their departure knowing that possibly they might never get the chance to be at Ramanasramam again:

“M.: You do not go anywhere away from the Presence as you imagine. The Presence is everywhere. The body moves from place to place; yet it does not leave the one Presence. So no one can be out of sight of the Supreme Presence. Since you identify one body with Bhagavan and another body with yourself, you find two separate entities and speak of going away from here. Wherever you may be, you cannot leave ME.

“To illustrate it: The pictures move on the screen in a cinema show; but does the screen itself move? No. The Presence is the screen: you, I, and others are the pictures. The individuals may move but not the Self.”\*

So when we say Bhagavan is everywhere what do we really mean? Bhagavan is telling us that our goal is here and now but we keep identifying with the pictures and not the screen on which it happens. Bhagavan does nothing. How can he when he is not identified with or controlled by a body? This may sound strange because the power of Grace which we ascribe to ‘him’ works wonders but it is true.

It is ‘automatic divine action’ which happens because we are receptive. For a moment we are in tune with this stillness and are not identified with any thought or feeling. There is no sense of opposition or separateness. There is no desire, no fear. This simple step is the beginning.

We slowly come to understand that Bhagavan is not bound by time or space nor our concepts as to who ‘he’ is. Once that indelible revelation is given to us through an unmistakable encounter at the Samadhi, or a dream, or an instant of recognition when we see his photograph or a sentence in his teachings, we are joined to his Name. We begin to realise that Bhagavan is everywhere and wherever any of us gather in his Name he is there; wherever any one of us prays to him, he is there; wherever any one contemplates him, he is there. For

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\* Venkataramiah, M., (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 470.

each one of us, we only need to remember him any time and in any place, he is always there.

We may not always be aware of Bhagavan but Bhagavan is certainly aware of us.

## 42. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi\*

**B**hagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is no name in mind and no form in matter. He is no theory in name nor practice in form. He is the Substratum, the Bed-rock of Truth in all names and forms.

HE is the life in all individuals and the only light in all souls. He is the Divine Presence in one and all. He is the Basic Principle, the fundamental fact in our everyday existence.

HIS is the province of spiritual life ever abiding in, through and beyond the passing and perishable, the fickle and fleeting. He is not external to us but ever present in us though we might fail to realise Him as such. He is awake in us while we are asleep.

HE is in all that was, that is and that will be. He is the ancient and yet the only modern. He is the soul of the whole within and without man, bird and beast.

HE is the wise and solid silence of the Supreme in the ignorant and shallow sound of the senses. He shines on the brow of immortality in the firmament of the Self with freedom and peace.

IN Him neither the sun, nor the moon nor the stars nor lightning shine, whereas He is shining and all these shine after Him.

HE is in the ether, air, fire, water and earth but these do not and cannot recognize Him, being inert. The speech, the mind and the intellect do not touch even the border of

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\* Sri Swami Rajeswarananda, *The Call Divine*, January 1954.



His immensity; He is the very embodiment of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss ever and ever.

BIRTH and death of the mundane world exist not in Him or for Him. We cannot seek Him anywhere but can see (realise) Him everywhere. He alone shines forth from every face.

HE is the wisdom of the wise, the strength of the strong, the brilliancy of the brain and the illumination of the soul. Sound, touch, taste, form and smell fall flat to taint Him. He is the real “I”, the One in all our apparent “I-s”, the many.

HE is the Supreme Consciousness, that includes and transcends all the lesser forms of consciousness, such as inward or outward, intermediary or homogeneous.

HE is the only reality in us and we are merely an expression of Him. We may not everyone of us be capable of realising the truth of it but we should not at any time lower it down.

AN individual is for a society, society for a community, community for a country or a nation, a nation for humanity and humanity for the realisation of Divinity. Thus, a true individual is universal. And true universal is the only individual.

FALLING short of realising the Light of Truth, the Light of the Self that lie is, we should not get upset nor upset others with the shadowy shapes of ‘I’ and ‘Mine’, the outer conditions of the material glitter and glamour.

BUT we should radiate an unshaking and unshakable calm, peace and bliss of the Beyond. We have thus to express the Divine Presence of our Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi as a living reality in our lives.

HE is the Absolute and lives in the Infinite. He is the Eternal rooted in Immortality.

HE is the Centre to which all radii of individual souls come and converge. He is the Centre of an infinite circle without a circumference. In other words, He is Centre and Circumference as well. He is awake to the Centre located

everywhere whereas we are conscious of our Centre being located in a particular body, mind and world. Shifting this individual Centre from the particular and identifying It with That of the universal is the truth of religion and religion of truth.

BREAK the seeming structure of an individual consciousness, there shines forth Sri Ramana in His Holy Majesty, in all glee and glory. We then come face to face with Him.

HE is the harmony and peace in the melody of the cosmos. He is the One and Only in the shrine of wisdom, in the temple of every soul and in the temple of the universe.

HE sees without eyes, speaks without tongue, hears without ears, and thinks without mind. Though with eyes, we see not; though with ears, we hear not; though with tongue, we speak not; though with mind, we think not, as these are mundane and material. He hears unheard and sees unseen. He is far and He is near. He is the means and He is the end in the goal of life with no dualistic make-up.

WHERE one sees another, hears another and knows another, that is small and finite. Where one sees no other, hears no other, and knows no other, that is great and infinite. Sri Ramana is such Light that cannot but be the Ideal of humanity.

HE is the underlying Unity in the midst of all diversities that exist on the surface. He is above all isms, schools, caste, creed, colour and the like. He is the sexless Self in us, the immortal and eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient.

LET us therefore stand with noble and sublime fixity of purpose and not waver in life. Let us flower into perfection with the manifestation of Sri Ramana, the Living Free, in us. Let us not rob ourselves of the blessings of our own Ideal, the realisation of the Supreme Self.

THE truth of Sri Ramana is not provincial or parochial. Provincialism in truth is a contradiction in terms. The Highest

Truth knows no boundary lines and does not limp from limit to limit. There is no division in the Infinite.

LET no darkness of human weakness blind us to the Divine Presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, hearing Whom everything becomes heard, seeing Whom there remains nothing else to be seen, and knowing Whom everything is known. He is the Seer in all sights; the Hearer in hearing, and the Knowledge in knowing.

How to see the Seer, hear the Hearer and know the Knower when there is no other? Knowing Him, the wise melt in Silence, melting in Silence with no trace of the ego, root and branch, is to know Him. Knowing is being and not even a process of becoming. Let us simply BE HIM through His own grace and the riddle of life and death is solved on earth without an iota of doubt. It is then the whole universe becomes our own Home and all the inhabitants our very Self, the One without a second, which Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is.

### 43. The Sat-Guru\*

“**F**rom darkness lead me to light,” says the Upanishad. The Guru is one who is competent to do this; and such a one was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The Guru is the dispeller of ignorance and awakener of understanding. Throughout the ages India has produced such.

The Sat-Guru, who is Divine Consciousness in human form, is the one guide to Enlightenment, the only bridge from the mental concepts in which the disciple is enclosed to spiritual consciousness. Said Sri Sankara: “Even though you possess learning and all gifts and endowments, it will not avail you unless your mind is protected by the Guru and absorbed in him.” And again, in *Vivekachudamani*, he says:

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\* Dr. T.N. Krishnaswami, *The Mountain Path*, July 1965.

“There are three things that are rare and acquired due to the Grace of God: a human birth, thirst for Liberation and the protective care of the Guru.”

Were it not for this manifestation of absolute Reality or pure Consciousness (which are the same) in human form, spiritual knowledge would be lost to the world. The Guru, who is a knower of Brahman, is equated in the Upanishads with Brahman Himself. Though living as a man in our midst, he is conscious of his Divine Identity. Were there none such as he, the doctrine of the Self would remain a mere theoretical concept for the discussion of philosophers. The mind of man has to be shown the way. For this, the pure Consciousness embodied in the Guru mingles with the same Consciousness awakened by him in the disciple. The Guru is ever ready to help and uplift those who appeal to him. To disregard such help would be folly. It is vanity and pride to suppose that one's own unaided efforts will suffice. To accept a Guru does not mean accepting the guidance of another man, but of pure Consciousness, shining through a human psychosomatic instrument.

Spiritual tradition has always accepted the need for initiation and guidance by a Master. “What is commonly called ‘self-reliance’ is only ego-reliance,” the Maharshi said. And again: “God, Guru and Self are the same.” Only he in whom this Divine Consciousness is awakened can lead us beyond the range of human perception. There are various ways in which the Guru can initiate and guide the disciple, but that he should do so has always been held necessary. Those who attack this tradition are really only attacking their own false conception of it.

The Guru has already trodden the path and can show it to the seeker. Even if he has arrived spontaneously at the goal, as did Bhagavan, he can still see and indicate the approaches to it. He may even transmit direct experience to the disciple as Sri Ramakrishna did for Vivekananda. However, this can never be stabilised so long as the disciple's *vasanas* or

inherent tendencies remain, since they drag him away again to the illusory world of sense-perception. There is no wisdom that can be given to all alike, says the *Gita*: “This wisdom must not be given to one who has no tapas, is not a devotee and is not in earnest.” This does not mean that the Guru holds guidance or Realisation back from anyone. The Maharshi once said that if the Guru could simply give Realisation there would not be even a cow left unrealised. Most people do not want spiritual knowledge, and it cannot be given to those who do not try to awaken it in themselves. It cannot be grasped by reason. Therefore, the Guru will not respond to those who question him or try to argue with him out of mere academic curiosity: “This wisdom is not to be had by reasoning.”

A Guru is only for those who seek contact with him for the sake of spiritual understanding, because this means seeking contact with the Truth in one’s own Heart through him. One who lives at a distance and approaches him in this way may receive guidance, while one who lives near him may not know how to ask. “The real Guru is in the Heart,” the Maharshi said. And “The task of the outer Guru is only to turn you inward to the Guru in your Heart.” We are told that the Divine dwells in the innermost recess of the Heart, but how many of us are competent to look inward and realise it? The power of the Guru in helping one to do so is far more important than any mere verbal explanation he may give, for the latter touches only the mental understanding. The Maharshi said, “A silent Guru is very potent. His work goes on inwardly where it is not apparent to the disciple.” And he gave assurance that “As the disciple dives inwards in search of the Self, the Guru will do his part.” But can this not be done without the intervention of an outer Guru? The Maharshi admitted that it can, but he added that there are very few who are so close to Enlightenment that they can dispense with the need for an outer Guru. This is because it is not a case of something new to be discovered but of the removal of obstructions to realisation of the ever-existing

Self. And since these obstructions are more emotional than theoretical, rooted in the desires rather than the intellect, outer aid is usually necessary to destroy them. “Sadhana is for the removal of ignorance, which is ingrained wrong ideas. It is not for acquiring the Self, because the Self is always there, but for becoming aware of it.”\*

Even though the disciple believes that Consciousness is One, he accepts the duality of Guru-disciple relationship in order to transcend it. He serves the outer Guru in order to realise the inner. “The disciple must work inwardly, but the Guru can work both inwardly and outwardly,” the Maharshi explained.

One should approach the Awakened and listen to his teaching, then dwell on it as a guide to sadhana. When instruction comes from a Guru it carries power. Out of the relationship of Guru and disciple realisation is born, as the fire of knowledge from the former is kindled in the heart of the latter.

The Upanishad says that the knower of Brahman is Brahman Himself. This is an indication that if we are unable to meditate on the formless Brahman we should meditate on a knower of Brahman. He teaches right doctrine, but it is very different from the same doctrine learned from a book. He himself is the living teaching. His presence inspires and strengthens us. His teaching has the authority of experience. It does not matter if the disciplines prescribed by the Masters vary or even if their doctrines differ on the mental plane; the essence of their teaching is the same, just as the milk from cows of different colours is all white.

“The spirit of the disciple is moribund owing to forgetfulness of his true nature. The Guru revives him by removing his supposed identity with body and mind.” The

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\* While speaking thus of the need for an outer Guru, it is to be remembered that the Maharshi himself still acts as Guru even without a human body. (EDITOR)

mind is apt to deny the existence of the Self because the Self is not an object of the senses. It can never be the object of knowledge but is itself the sole knower. Therefore, a search for it by the mind can never succeed. “Logical explanations have no finality. Why look outward and explain phenomena? One should learn to attend to the knower of the phenomena.” The knower of the phenomena is Reality. It just is; it is not affected by discussions or logical conclusions. It is the Grace of the Guru that enables us to realise our identity with this Reality. Since it is the Reality, it is not something to be acquired in the future; it just is, now, eternally.

So long as the disciple lives in duality and seeks to transcend it, he feels oppressed by burdens and hindered by obstacles. These are in fact mere manifestations of the tendencies in his own mind that hold him back from Enlightenment and make him cling to the duality he seeks to escape from. To such a one the Guru appears as the bearer of burdens and remover of obstructions: the destroyer of ignorance and giver of Liberation. But effort must be made by the disciple to remove the obstructions. And although it is true to say that the Guru is the giver of Liberation it is also true to say that the disciple must earn it by making himself fit to receive it.

The Guru does not add to the ideas or theories with which the mind of the disciple is already cluttered. Rather he induces cessation of thought. “The mind creates the world and life and obscures the Self. Becoming obscures Being.” It often happened that someone came to the Maharshi with a whole list of questions that he had drawn up and, sitting before him, found not so much that the answers came as that the questions faded out and ceased to be important.

Life has plunged us into a state that can be called sleep – spiritual sleep. All our life activities are done in this sleep. The Guru is the Awakened; he does not become involved in this sleep but helps us to awaken from it. You encounter life through a thing called ‘yourself’, that is through a fictitious

apparatus for living. It is this which takes charge of body and senses, thinks through your mind, talks through your mouth, uses your name and mistakes itself for you. But just as it mistakes itself for you, so it mistakes the Guru for another separate self outside of you; and that is its fatal error and also your salvation, for the Guru, having freed himself from the clutches of this fiend, can free you from it and lead you to the experience of the One Self.

Thereby he gives a new meaning to the word ‘I’. Before meeting him, you attributed it to this pseudo-self, but ‘I’ or ‘*Aham*’ is the name of Being, of God. He alone can call Himself ‘I’. You only can insofar as you are One with Him. Individual human life goes on like a dream. In a dream you mistake the dream-self for ‘I’. Similarly, in this life you mistake the fictitious pseudo-self for ‘I’. The Guru helps you to awaken from this illusion. “To keep the I-thought alert is the only *upadesa* (teaching).” He teaches you to abide in and as the Self while apparently living in the world. “One should not lose consciousness of this ‘I’ under any circumstances. This is the remedy for all the ills of life.” “The ‘I’ springs up from the centre of our being and our only concern should be with this ‘I’.”

The true Self is quality-less and therefore beyond description or even knowledge. It is thought that obscures it. “Give up thoughts. You need not give up anything else. The body and the comforts of life are no hindrance to realisation. The loss of the body is not Enlightenment, it is death. The loss of the ego-sense, the I-concept, is what is required.” The very presence of the Guru calms down the waves of the mind and brings it to that condition of stillness in which it is simply aware.

Those who saw the Maharshi sitting in samadhi were moved and awed by it. He radiated peace as the sun radiates light. His imperturbable composure impressed some, his lively explanations others, his grace and compassion yet others; some enjoyed his conversation and some his tremendous



silence. Thousands flocked for a sight of Him. People felt that here was God incarnate walking on earth. He assured us when leaving the body that he was not going away. “People say that I am going away, but where can I go? I am here.” Being universal, there was no going from here to there for him. Having realised that he was not this body, there was no return to any other body. He has assured us that “he who is ready for Divine Knowledge will be led to it.”

#### **44. The Uniqueness of Sri Maharshi’s Realisation\***

There have been many teachers of *jnana yoga* in our country, but very few *jnana yogins*, many teachers of Advaita, but very few who had the realisation of Advaita. Sri Ramana Maharshi, on the other hand, was not only a great teacher of *jnana yoga* all his life, but also a great *jnana yogin*. To use the figure employed by Sri Ramakrishna, he was a man who described Benares after seeing the Holy City with his own eyes and not after-seeing only a map of it. The remarkable power which he exercised over the minds of men for generations was due to the fact that all his life he was describing an experience of his own and not merely expounding a doctrine.

It may be said that the Maharshi was a *jnana yogin* by birth. For, even while he was a lad of sixteen, illumination came to him suddenly, without any previous training or effort, and at once he became firmly established in the very centre of Reality for the rest of his life.

The remarkable passage in which he describes his illumination deserves to be quoted:

“I felt I was going to die ... I did not however trouble myself to discover if the fear was well grounded. I felt ‘I’ was

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\* Prof. D.S. Sarma, *The Mountain Path*, April 1977.

going to die’, and at once set about thinking out what I should do. I did not care to consult doctors or elders or even friends. I felt I had to solve the problem myself then and there.

“The shock of fear of death made me at once introspective, or ‘introverted’. I said to myself mentally, i.e., without uttering the words – ‘Now, death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.’ I at once dramatized the scene of death. I extended my limbs and held them rigid as though rigor-mortis had set in. I imitated a corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips tightly together so that no sound might escape. Let not the word ‘I’ or any other word be uttered. ‘Well then’. said I to myself, ‘this body is dead.! It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am “I” dead? Is the body “I”? This body is silent and inert. But I feel the full force of my personality and even the sound “I” within myself, – apart from the body. So “I” am a spirit, a thing transcending the body. The material body dies, but the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am therefore the deathless spirit’. All this was not a mere intellectual process, but flashed before me vividly as living truth, something which I perceived immediately, without any argument almost. ‘I’ was something very real, the only real thing in that state, and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that. The ‘I’ or my ‘self’ was holding the focus of attention by a powerful fascination from that time forwards. Fear of death had vanished at once and forever.”

There have been other instances, in the lives of the mystics and saints of the world, of commonplace things like a tree in full blossom in spring, or a flight of white cranes across the clear blue autumnal sky, or a silvery cascade running down a mountain-slope bringing about the realisation of the Universal Spirit. But they have been more or less temporary experiences. In the case of some, the experience never repeated itself. In the case of others, it needed extraordinary efforts to bring

it back and make it steady. That is why in the literature of mysticism the so-called mystic way is described as consisting of three stages, after the initial awakening – namely, purgation, illumination and union. In our own religious tradition, we are familiar with long periods of tapas which the aspirants had to go through before they could have a vision of the Deity they wanted to see. And it is well known how Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras* has mapped out the entire way leading to samadhi or union and described its eight stages beginning with *Yama* and *Niyama*. But, in the case of the Maharshi, there were no periods of sadhana, no stages of the mystic way and no laborious practice of yoga. The realisation that came to him with the thought of death came once for all and it became an abiding possession. The present writer, when he went to pay his respects to the Maharshi in September, 1946, put to him the following question:

“In the lives of the western mystics we find descriptions of what is called the mystic way with the three well-marked stages of purgation, illumination and union. The purgatory stage corresponds to what we call the sadhana period. Was there any such period in the life of Bhagavan?”

And without the least hesitation came the following reply:

“I know no such period. I never performed any pranayama or *Japa*. I knew no mantras. I had no idea of meditation or contemplation. Even when I came to hear of such things later I was never attracted by them. Even now my mind refuses to pay any attention to them. Sadhana implies an object to be gained and the means of gaining it. What is there to be gained which we do not already possess? In meditation, concentration and contemplation, what we have to do is only not to think of anything, but to be still. This natural State is given many names – moksha, *jnana*, Atma, etc., and these give rise to many controversies. There was a time when I used to remain with my eyes closed. That does not mean that I was practising any sadhana then. Even now I sometimes remain with my eyes closed. If people choose to say that I am

doing some sadhana at the moment, let them say so. It makes no difference to me. People seem to think that by practising some elaborate sadhana the Self would someday descend upon them as something very big and with tremendous glory and they would then have what is called *sakshatkaram*. The Self is *sakshat*, all right, but there is no *karam* or *kritam* about it. The word *karam* implies one's doing something. But the Self is realised not by one's doing something, but by one's refraining from doing anything – by remaining still and being simply what one really is.”

The audience assembled in the Hall were astonished at the vehemence with which the Maharshi spoke these words. He spoke, of course, in Tamil. The present writer later on put the speech into English and sent it to the Maharshi for approval. He approved it and it was published in *Vedanta Kesari* with the caption: *Nastyakrltah kritena*. The latter is a quotation from the *Mundaka Upanishad*. It means that what is Uncreated cannot be gained by anything that one can do.

## 45. Dreams\*

‘We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of and our short life  
Is rounded by a sleep’.

Shakespeare really did know what he was talking about and it was not just poetic effervescence. Maharshi used to say exactly the same.

I suppose I questioned Bhagavan more often on this subject than any others, though some doubts always remained for me. He had always warned that as soon as one doubt is

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\* Sadhu Arunachala (Major Alan Chadwick), *The Call Divine*, March 1954.

cleared another will spring up in its place, and there is no end to doubts.

“But Bhagavan,” I would repeat, “dreams are disconnected, while the waking experience goes on from where it left off and is admitted by all to be more or less continuous.”

“Do you say this in your dreams?” Bhagavan would ask. “They seemed perfectly consistent and real to you then. It is only now, in your waking state that you question the reality of the experience. This is not logical.”

Bhagavan refused to see the least difference between the two states, and in this he agreed with all the great Advaitic Seers. Some have questioned if Sankara did not draw a line of difference between these two states, but Bhagavan has persistently denied it. “Sankara did it apparently only for the purpose of clearer exposition,” the Maharshi would explain.

However, I tried to twist my questions, the answer I received was always the same: “Put your doubts when in the dream state itself. You do not question the waking state when you are awake, you accept it. You accept it in the same way you accept your dreams. Go beyond both states and all three states including deep sleep. Study them from that point of view. You now study one limitation from the point of view of another limitation. Could anything be more absurd? Go beyond all limitation, then come here with your doubts.”

But in spite of this, doubt still remained. I somehow felt at the time of dreaming there was something unreal in it, not always of course, but just glimpses now and then.

“Doesn’t that ever happen to you in your waking state too?” Bhagavan queried. “Don’t you sometimes feel that the world you live in and the thing that is happening is unreal?”

Still, in spite of all this, doubt persisted.

But one morning I went to Bhagavan and, much to his amusement, handed him a paper on which the following was written:

‘Bhagavan remembers that I expressed some doubts about the resemblance between dreams and waking experience. Early in the morning most of these doubts were cleared by the following dream, which seemed particularly objective and real:

‘I was arguing philosophy with someone and pointed out that all experience was only subjective, that there was nothing outside the mind. The other person demurred, pointing out how solid everything was and how real experience seemed, and it could not be just personal imagination.

‘I replied, “No, it is nothing but a dream. Dream and waking experience are exactly the same.”

‘You say that now,” he replied, “but you would never say a thing like that in your dream.”

‘And then I woke up.’

## 46. Sunk in the Ocean of Bliss\*

“Those who take refuge at the lotus feet of the supreme Lord of Mercy ... seeking Thy benign grace ... abide happy, sunk in the ocean of bliss.”

– Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Necklet of Nine Gems*, v.3

*I am indebted to my Sadguru, Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, whose depth of love and knowledge launched me on a thrilling voyage of discovery of the fullness of Bhagavan. This article draws greatly from his satsangs and unpublished biographical work, Ramana the Maharshi.*

Sri Ramana Maharshi and the path of Self-enquiry – these two are almost synonymous and Bhagavan’s name will be forever associated with that practice. He is generally regarded as a peerless *jnani* and a masterful exponent of Advaita and

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\* Alison Williams, *The Mountain Path*, July 2003.

Self-enquiry, and Arunachala is said to be the centre of that practice. However, to view this as the totality of Bhagavan and Self-enquiry as the only way he advocated is to do him a disservice, and to deprive ourselves of some of the beauty and riches of his gift to us – for Bhagavan shows us so much more.

Undoubtedly Bhagavan was a *jnani* of the highest order, but he was also a consummate *bhakta* – and far too great to confine himself to one path. He fully recognized that different seekers require different methods according to the individual's need and nature. Thus we find Bhagavan giving advice on diet, lifestyle, posture, worship, attitudes to work and family life, as well as on pranayama and yoga, and answering questions on texts, scriptures, and various spiritual practices. If Bhagavan our master did not limit himself exclusively to Self-enquiry, then need we do so? It is the purpose of this article to question whether, in our zest to follow the practice of Self-enquiry, we have inadvertently overlooked other aspects of his wonderful life and teachings, equally powerful, sublime and beneficial to the seeker.

### A Higher Power

Not only were Bhagavan's teachings not limited to one practice, but he valued what could not be practised, and pointed out that grace is the key. When questioned as to whether he himself did any *sadhana* replied, "I know no such period... I had no rules of meditation or contemplation."\* He often spoke about the significance of surrender and reassured devotees that everything would come to them through the grace of the *Sadguru* and unfold according to the will of Iswara. In one dialogue Bhagavan said that instructions are necessary only for those who do not believe in the guidance of God,† and that those who seek freedom from misery are

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\* *Sri Ramana Reminiscences* by G.V. Subbaramayya, p.153, 1994 edn.

† *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* no. 596, p.591, 2000 edn.

told that God guides everything and they need not worry about what happens. “If they are of the best type,” he says, “they at once believe it and firmly abide by faith in God.”\* When Prajananda wrote asking to become Bhagavan’s disciple, Bhagavan indicated that all that was needed was faith and love towards the guru.† Therefore, according to Bhagavan, the “best type” of sadhaka is one who can hand over the reins to the Guru (or God or Self which, he said, were all synonymous) and leave him to do the work. It is interesting to note here, that with regard to his own case Bhagavan stated, “The fact is I did nothing. Some higher power took hold of me and I was entirely in its hand.”‡

### The Longing for Bhakti

Before probing further into the role of practice and Self-enquiry let us first take a closer look at the part Self-enquiry played in Bhagavan’s own realisation and how he spoke of it with his visitors and devotees. When we read Bhagavan’s description of that famous event in that small room in Madurai over one hundred years ago, it is clear that the enquiry – “Who is it that dies? Is it this body? What is it that remains? Is it me? What is this thing I call ‘I’ anyway?” – lasted only a few moments. Similarly, the fear of death passed quickly, the same day. Bhagavan said he would lose himself “in the all-absorbing concentration on myself, on the spirit, current or force (*avesam*) which constituted myself,”§ and that it remained with him ever after. This dramatic and transforming experience was expressed in Bhagavan as a kind of indefinable longing. His mood became withdrawn and pensive. He tried

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\* *ibid.*,

† *Conscious Immortality* by M. Venkatramiah and P. Brunton, p.139, 1996 edn.

‡ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, by Devaraja Mudaliar, 4-10-46. p.317, 2002 edn.

§ *Self-Realisation* by B. V. Narasimha Swami, Ch. 5. p.18, 2002 edn.



to give an explanation for his behaviour that would satisfy his family and told them he had an unbearable headache. “But,” he said, “it was not a headache but an inexpressible anguish which I suppressed at the time.”\* He also commented later that the event of his awakening started two new “habits” in him: introspection, and a tendency to weep whenever he stood before the images of the sixty-three Tamil Saivite saints (*Nayanmars*), and the deities (Siva, Meenakshi, Nataraja) in the big temple in Madurai. Until then he had occasionally visited the temple with his playmates, but had not felt any emotional response. Now, however, he would go almost every day and stand before the images, which triggered in him a spontaneous upwelling of emotion. “Without feeling pain or pleasure tears would flow.”† He also prayed, not for anything in particular, he said, but he longed for the grace and blessings of Iswara. There was, however, one specific thing he would pray for, ardently and tearfully: the same bhaktas the sixty-three saints. He tells us that he yearned for that kind of bhakti and that, “Going to school, books in hand, I would be eagerly desiring and expecting that God would suddenly appear before me in the sky; and so I would be looking up at the sky. What sort of progress could such a one make in his studies at school!”‡ It is to be remembered that all this came after his death experience. The sequence of events and Bhagavan’s description of them clearly show that this was a unique spiritual experience, rather than any kind of intellectual conceptualisation or the result of any practice. If we pause for a moment here, we cannot help but be touched by the beauty and poignancy of the situation. There is wonder at the might of the grace which struck the young Venkataraman like a thunderbolt and claimed him as its own. At the same time

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\* *Talks*, no.419., p.404, 2000 edn.

† *Self-Realisation*, Ch. 5. p.19, 2002 edn.

‡ *Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar, entry for 18-3-1945, p.2, 2002 edn.

there is the image of the teenager, till then seemingly quite normal and enjoying the usual schoolboy activities, suddenly swept off his feet by an overwhelming and life-changing experience, possessed by something that was compellingly fascinating (that “higher power” or *avesam*) yet for which he had no words and apparently nobody he could turn to for an explanation or guidance. In addition, the boy had to endure hostility from his schoolmates and older brother towards his abstracted demeanour, as well as waves of intense longing.

### **Arunachala drew me to him\***

After about six weeks of struggle, stung by a comment from his brother, Bhagavan immediately resolved to leave home for Arunachala, which had held a strong attraction for him since he was a young boy. He felt that his brother’s taunts were a call from his divine father. As he wrote in his farewell note, “In obedience to his command, I am going in search of my father” (*italics added*). But it was not his own father he was seeking. It was rather that he had undergone a transformation that had changed him forever and had awakened him to the presence of something immense, mysterious, and great; that “something great” he called the father. This was his personalized way of expressing whatever it was that had possessed him for the last six weeks, and his urge to make it more concrete and go deeper into that experience. To him, Arunachala was the concrete form of this inner experience and an outward symbol of what he had realised. He simply had to be united with it. In Madurai he was unable to interest himself any longer in mundane or domestic matters, and until he arrived at the feet of the object of his love – that for which he had felt *sphurana*<sup>†</sup> for as long as he could remember – he remained restless and, as he said, suffering inexplicable anguish. When Bhagavan finally arrived in Tiruvannamalai

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\* ‘Eight Stanzas to Arunachala’, v.1, *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.101, 2002 edn.

† Sanskrit: throbbing, glittering, springing forth.

it was like a homecoming for him. He hurried straight to Arunachaleswara Temple, where all three compound doors were open, as also the inner sanctum, yet curiously there was not a single other devotee present. Arunachaleswara welcomed its son with immediate darshan. Later, it blessed him with a natural abhishekha in the form of a brief shower of rain. We might say that Bhagavan's arrival at the feet of his divine father, Arunachala, was in a sense the culmination of his own enquiry into his identity: "Who am I? – Ah, I am the loving son of That, Arunachala." Arunachala had pulled him all his young life and he was now able to fulfil that pull by staying in its proximity. He expressed his identity in various ways: he called Arunachala his Beloved, his bridegroom, his Guru, his father, his mother, Siva, his lodestone, and the remainder of his life was spent in unending expression of this love. Bhagavan first lived at the foot of the Hill, then on it, then again at its base. He frequently walked around the Hill on *giripradakshina*, he climbed all over it as if unable to caress it enough – in fact he once claimed that there was not an inch of the Hill he had not explored. Even in his last days when his body was weak and wracked by rheumatism and sickness, he insisted on strolling on his beloved Hill as long as he could walk. He wrote exquisite poems of adoration to Arunachala and he attributed his own attainment solely to its grace. As Bhagavan lay on his sick-bed shedding his grace on devotees to the last, he spent his final moments in the body listening to the chanting of "Arunachala-Siva", tears of emotion trickling down his cheeks.

Was this not a great love affair? If Bhagavan had realised the Self solely through Self-enquiry, what need would there have been for him to come to Arunachala? He could have stayed more comfortably in his home and avoided distressing his family by his sudden disappearance. If he came only to honour the Hill and pay tribute to Lord Arunachaleswara, why did he stay on? During the more than fifty years he spent

there, why would Bhagavan not leave the Hill even for one single day?

### **Taking Refuge – the Beginning and the End**

It is commonly held that Bhagavan's state was complete after his "death experience". Of course, this is true in one way, but in another way, it was a beginning rather than an end – the beginning of finding love, living in love, of falling into his true identity – and then the ongoing enjoyment of the expression of that identity with his divine father. It seems that Bhagavan lived in an ever-deepening, ever expanding, experience of that. With every breath he inhaled his Beloved, drew closer and experienced it more and more, enjoying that experience until his very last breath. If it is true that in poetry a person comes closest to revealing their soul, then even a cursory glance at Bhagavan's poems would identify Arunachala as the core of his being. See the outpouring of love and ardour in the Five Hymns! How full of passion they are and how complete – could anybody express it in a better way or add anything further? They are almost the definitive word in devotional love poetry and emotional expression. And it is significant that these were the only works that Bhagavan wrote spontaneously, without being asked by devotees. The poems clearly indicate Bhagavan's disposition for surrender to one's object of love (Arunachala, in his case) and dependence on the grace of the Guru.

"Those who take refuge at the lotus feet of the supreme Lord of Mercy presiding over Arunachala – their minds free of attachment to riches, land and relatives, and to caste, and made ever purer by seeking Thy benign grace – these rid themselves of darkness, and in the steady light of thy ever-protecting grace, which shines like the golden rays of the rising sun, they abide happy, sunk in the ocean of bliss."\* Observe how Bhagavan reassures us: if we take refuge and seek

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\* 'Necklet of Nine Gems', stanza 3, *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.95, 2002 edn.

grace, we will be happy and blissful. It is so simple! In Five Stanzas to Sri Arunachala, Bhagavan first acknowledges that meditation practices may bring us to fulfilment: “Abandoning the outer world with mind and breath controlled, to meditate on thee within, the yogi sees your light, oh Arunachala, and finds delight in you.”

But in the last verse Bhagavan leaves no room for doubt over what is the ultimate and what should be our highest goal:

“He who dedicates his mind to you, and seeing you always beholds the universe as your figure, he who at all times glorifies you as none other than the Self, he is the master without rival, being one with you, oh Arunachala, and lost in your bliss.”

When we investigate the daily life of this “master without rival”, we see that every moment was indeed an expression of his remarkable joy in and love for Arunachala – a “glorifying” of his god. Thus to me, Bhagavan’s greatest and most powerful teaching is his life itself, not the answers he was prompted to give to questions on philosophy and various practices, inspiring though they are. His love for Arunachala was revealed in his love for all and everything, including plant and animal life. We see him leading a life supremely carefree and happy. There was a majesty in his self-containment and dispassion, needing nothing and sharing everything. Bhagavan himself spoke about the exhilaration of living off alms, with no possessions. Of his early days on the Hill, he said, “I felt like a king, and more than a king.”\* When he tells Devaraja Mudaliar, “You cannot conceive of the majesty and dignity I felt while begging,” we too can sense the thrill of his blissful liberated existence.†

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\* *Ramana Maharshi*, Ch. 3, p.17 by K. Swaminathan, 1979 edn., pub: National Book Trust.

† *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 30-5-46. p.240, 2002 edn.

**Love...in everything you do**

Bhagavan never gave himself any airs or graces; he participated fully in ashram chores and was conspicuous for his refusal to allow the ashram authorities to give him any special treatment. What was good enough for him was good enough for all the devotees, and vice versa. His compassionate love showed itself in his round-the-clock accessibility and he had nothing of what we would call a personal life. All were received equally, and his consideration for animals is well-documented. “You cannot love God without knowing Him nor know Him without loving Him. Love manifests itself in everything you do,” said Bhagavan.\* In a continuous glorifying of his God and manifestation of love, Bhagavan would undertake the most mundane tasks with utter care and attention. With what focus would he prepare the lunchtime rasam, or carve a stick, or polish a cooking pot – diligence and dedication were not confined to discussions of lofty spiritual matters! Indeed, we may discern that Bhagavan’s entire life was one continuous flow of worship. Nor was Bhagavan always serious. On the contrary, he delighted his devotees with his wit and keen sense of humour. He enjoyed a joke and was himself a great story-teller and gifted mimic.

**If you could trust your guru...**

Thus in Bhagavan we have a fully-rounded human being, living in love, inspired by a divine love, and radiating a divine love that touched the hearts and minds of thousands – and still does – yet leading a simple and natural life. Bhagavan shows us the way to be fully human, to realise our full ‘human-hood’; he is an example of fully realised humanity. His life is an intimation of what is possible for each of us. By steady moment-to-moment example, as one who realised his full human potential, he shows us the way. His awakening

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\* A. Ramanananda Swarnagiri, *Crumbs from His Table*, p.31, 1995 edn.

was truly an awakening of the heart, in the fullest meaning of the word – his heart’s desire and his heart’s subsequent fulfilment.

So what is the place of Self-enquiry in all of this? We have already seen that for Bhagavan it lasted just a few seconds. What about Bhagavan’s teachings – how do they apply to us? “Submit to me and I’ll strike the mind,” Bhagavan has promised.\* He even told us to be like the 1st class railway passenger who tells the guard his destination, locks the doors, and then goes to sleep. “The rest is done by the guard. If you could trust your Guru as much as you trust the railway guard, it would be quite enough to make you reach your destination. Your business is to shut the doors and windows and sleep. The guard will wake you up at your destination.”†

Despite this firm assurance from our Master, we find it difficult to really close the doors and sleep. We strive and get frustrated and anxious. The ego turns us into 2nd class passengers, unable to let go and trust the *Sadguru* to take us to our destination. As Bhagavan said, “The ego is a very powerful elephant which cannot be brought under control by anyone less than a lion – who is none other than the Guru.”‡ Just as a mother gives her child some toy to keep it occupied so that she will not be hindered in her work of taking care of the child’s needs, the guru prescribes some spiritual exercises so that we will not create new obstacles (*vasanas*) and hinder him in his work of shaping us to spiritual perfection. The practice of Self-enquiry can help to loosen the ego’s grip and is useful in bringing the wandering mind back to its source, where Bhagavan, the inner guru, can pounce on it and destroy it. As Bhagavan says in Eleven Verses, “What a wonder it

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\* Arthur Osborne, *Ramana Arunachala*, ‘The Direct Path’, p.39, 1961 edn.

† Krishna Bhikshu, ‘The Bhagavan I Knew’, *Ramana Smriti*, Centenary Souvenir, 1980. Also in the author’s Telugu biography *Sri Ramana Leela*.

‡ *Talks*, Talk 398.

is! Such a destroyer of lives is this magnificent Arunachala which shines in the heart.” And how does it work? – we don’t know! Even Bhagavan declares, “Its action is mysterious, past human understanding.” We only know that the moment we get to the source, the enquiry ends.

### Meaningful Self-enquiry

Though this enquiry seems to be a simple and direct method, by itself it does not suit everyone. Bhagavan acknowledged this several times and said that Self-enquiry suits only mature souls.\* The trouble starts when we are all prone to list ourselves in this category, subconsciously or otherwise. One of the reasons for this may be the mistaken notion that Bhagavan taught and favoured only Self-enquiry, and that to follow Bhagavan is to be constantly reiterating, “Who am I?” so we stick to it rigidly, when our personality, or even our mood, is not really suited to it. This may lead to unspoken frustration with our spiritual progress.

Bhagavan told us, “Enquiry is not the only way. If one does sadhana with name and form, or *japa*, or any of the methods with determination and perseverance, one becomes THAT. According to the capacity of each individual, one spiritual practice is better than another and several shades and variations of them have been given. Everyone is born with the samskaras of their past lives. One method will be easy to one person and difficult to another. *There can be no general rule.*”† (italics added). There are many instances of Bhagavan encouraging seekers to stick to other forms of sadhana. Clearly, he never prescribed an all-purpose rule for his devotees.

In that case, why the common impression that Bhagavan taught only Self-enquiry? It is true that Bhagavan repeatedly said in reply to questions, “Know, or find out the questioner first.”

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\* *Spiritual Instruction*, Chapter 2, p. 53, 1999 edn.

† Suri Nagamma, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, letter of 29th Nov 1947, p.275, 1995 edn.



However, if we examine the recorded dialogues, it is evident that Bhagavan did not relish being dragged into theoretical or academic discussions. Speculation on metaphysical concepts such as the origin of the universe, the occult, etc., did not appeal to him. Very pragmatically he would bring the questioner to their senses by saying, “First find out to whom the question arises,” or “First know the Self and everything will be known.” It was an effective technique of stopping the questioner in his or her tracks and turning them inwards to the source of Self. His close devotees were well aware of this and used to call it his *Brahmastram* (invincible divine weapon). Whenever they wanted an answer from Bhagavan they would first beg him not to use his *Brahmastram*; Bhagavan would laughingly agree and then give them the detailed explanation they were after. At this point we may feel that there is an apparent contradiction: on the one hand Bhagavan is saying that Self-enquiry is only for a few, for the mature, and on the other hand, he says that the best sadhaka is one who surrenders and depends solely upon the guru’s grace, leaving everything to him. We may wonder whether such childlike dependence can ever be termed “mature”. In fact, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” Actually, it is the spiritually mature soul who realises the futility of his or her own efforts, recognizes their helplessness, and learns to depend on the grace that will be showered on them more and more. At this stage the practice of enquiry may arise naturally and spontaneously, as it did with the mature soul called Venkataraman, at the extraordinarily tender age of sixteen. If the enquiry takes form in this way, then it will undoubtedly bear fruit and propel us towards our goal.

### **Finding Our Own Arunachala**

Once Duncan Greenlees, a British devotee, was alone with Bhagavan in the hall. He was reading a book and Bhagavan asked him what it was. When Greenlees told him it was about Vedanta, Bhagavan retorted, “Read Milarepa!” (Bhagavan was referring to the biography of the Tibetan yogi,

Milarepa, which the editor, Oxford don W.Y. Evans-Wentz, had recently presented to the ashram).<sup>\*</sup> This apparently small incident tells us much (for one thing, it was very unusual for Bhagavan to speak English). Milarepa is renowned as an extraordinary saint, who as a seeker was so severely tested by his guru, Marpa, that it seemed practically like torture. However, perseverance and the longing to reach his goal triumphed – but only when backed by the grace of his guru. It is as if Bhagavan is saying, “Get some juice into you! Understand what it is really like to live and suffer through love and to experience devotion to one’s Beloved and an intense desire for fulfilment; see how the realisation comes only at the instant the guru bestows his grace!”

To his close devotees Bhagavan would often recommend reading the lives of saints and he was fond of recounting stories of their lives (at such moments he would sometimes be moved to tears and unable to continue). Bhagavan said that the only sacred text he had read before coming to Tiruvannamalai was the *Periya Puranam* – the lives of the sixty-three Saivite saints referred to above – and the Bible. Let us read the lives of saints, learn from their struggle and its resolution and go into it deeply. Let us not limit ourselves to a dry practice that shields us from truly experiencing life’s vicissitudes or feeling the highs and lows of this human existence, nor use sadhana as an excuse to cower from life. Don’t let’s worry about becoming divine, let us first try to become fully human.

Ramana himself said he never knew of any philosophy until he came to Arunachala. It was not a philosophy that drove him out of his house in Madurai and he had no longing or prayer to be released from samsara. “All that idea and talk of samsara and bondage I learned only after coming to this place and reading books”.<sup>†</sup> It may have appeared that, for

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<sup>\*</sup> *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, p. 342, 1995 edn.

<sup>†</sup> Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji’s unpublished ‘Ramana the Maharshi’.

the first few years after arriving at Arunachala, Bhagavan mortified his body (“seeming tapas” as Arthur Osborne aptly termed it), but Bhagavan tells us this was not the case. Rather, he was simply immersed in and enjoying the bliss that engulfed him. We have seen how, later, this was expressed in myriad ways in his daily life.

Let us take our cue from Ramana and try to discover what it is that triggers our own love and desire for union, what it is that inspires us. And when we find it, we should stop at nothing to foster it and allow it to rule our lives. The object may be Arunachala, it may be Bhagavan, our guru, a deity, or any other form. Bhagavan said even an idealized form of beauty would do, but we should stick to it one pointedly.\* Once that love, that passionate interest is triggered, there is no need for any other practice. Or rather, it is then that the real practice begins, the real sadhana.

Being a I class passenger is not so easy – can we sleep? Can we trust the conductor? Are we sure we are on the right train? Why is it going so slowly? Sometimes it even seems to stop or go backwards... we will occasionally be assailed by such doubts and even despair. But when we have such a magnificent example in the life of Bhagavan, when he has clearly shown us the way, and when we still have the palpable presence of his being, is it not perverse to turn away from this? By all means let us make use of whatever tools we can, including Self-enquiry, but the backdrop of all our activities should be the object of our love, the *sruti* note of our existence.

So let us take up the challenge and aim for the highest; to be, in Bhagavan’s words, masters without rival. Let us pray for the grace of Bhagavan that we may glorify him at all times, see the whole universe as him, and truly become one with our own Arunachala.

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\* *Talks*, no.27, p.27, 2000 edn.

## 47. God and Destiny\*

The debate between which is greater fate or free-will occurs sometime or the other to most of us. The following article on this issue by a great devotee of Bhagavan Devaraja Mudaliar is very instructive.

*“The moving finger writes and, having writ,  
Moves on; nor all thy piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.”*

In my opinion, Omar, the poet, was not a scoffer when he wrote this but an earnest seeker brought up against the impenetrable wall of predestination. The majority of Hindus also believe that destiny cannot be overcome. They speak of God having written their fate in life on their foreheads, so that all events, pleasant and painful, will come to them as ordained. Those who have studied the question of karma declare, however, that destiny is not anything imposed on them by an arbitrary God but is a result of the law of cause and effect, each man having to go through such experiences as his past actions have provoked. Each action of a man is followed by its consequences, whether pleasurable or painful, and no man can escape them. If it is not possible to exhaust all the consequences of one's actions in one lifetime, one may have to pass through successive lives to exhaust one's karma.

Serious thinkers have welcomed this doctrine because it gives some rational explanation for the great differences between man and man that we find in the world. How could one explain otherwise the vast differences in a world created and governed by a just, impartial and loving God? The doctrine of karma is so basic to Hinduism that we cannot conceive of Hinduism without it.

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\* Devaraja Mudaliar, *The Mountain Path*, April 1967.

Karma is classified into three categories: *prarabdha*, *agami* and *sanchita*. When a man is born, the amount of his accumulated karma, which is to be worked off in this lifetime, is called his *prarabdha karma*, and the residue is *sanchita*. That which he accumulates in this life is called *agami*. It is generally held that *prarabdha* at least, must be gone through by everyone and that there is no escape from it. I will give here Bhagavan's teaching on the matter.

Referring to Sri Krishna's telling Arjuna: "Deluded by Maya you refuse to fight, but your own nature will force you to fight;" a devotee asked Bhagavan whether we have no freewill at all. Bhagavan replied: "You always have freedom not to identify yourself with the body and the pleasures and pains that come to it as per its *prarabdha*."

One summer afternoon I was sitting opposite Sri Bhagavan in the Old Hall with a fan in my hand and said to him: "I can understand that the outstanding events in a man's life, such as his country, nationality, family, career or profession, marriage, death, etc., are all predestined by his karma, but can it be that all the details of his life, down to the minutest, have already been determined? Now, for instance, I put this fan that is in my hand down on the floor here. Can it be that it was already decided that on such and such a day, at such and such an hour, I would move the fan like this and put it down here?"

Bhagavan replied: "Certainly." He continued: "Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it is to pass through was already decided when it came into existence."

Thereupon I naturally exclaimed: "What becomes then of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions?"

Bhagavan explained: "The only freedom one has is to strive for and acquire the *Jnana* which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *prarabdha* (destiny) based on the balance sheet of past lives, and a man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits

of its actions or to be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities.”

From various other talks that I had with him, I am convinced that this was Bhagavan’s teaching. I will only refer here to the classic reply he gave to his mother when, as a young Sage, he rejected her tearful request to go back home with her. “The Ordainer controls the fate of man according to his *prarabdha*. What is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. What is destined to happen will happen, try as one may to prevent it. This is certain. So, the best course is to remain silent.”

However, if the law of karma as pure cause and effect is so supreme as to be absolutely inviolable and inexorable, one may ask of what use is religion, God or prayer. There seems to have been no time when man did not turn to an all-powerful and all-loving God who could save him from his sins and suffering and give him peace and bliss. Starting from the Vedic times and passing through the period of the great bhaktas, both Saivite and Vaishnavite, and down to comparatively recent times, there is a great mass of religious literature which states quite clearly that whatever sins a man may have committed, God in His mercy can save him. They have also stated that all karma, including *prarabdha*, can be destroyed by the Grace of God, like cotton by fire. Western saints and mystics have said the same thing and have ridiculed the idea that because God is just, impartial and righteous He cannot save the sinner but must punish him first for his transgressions. For if that were so, what would become of the other attributes of God such as Mercy, Love, Fatherhood and Motherhood? The *Vaishnavites* stress the quality of *Vatsalya* or loving-kindness in God and illustrate it by the *vatsalya* of a cow which, as soon as its calf is born, begins to lick it all over, oblivious to the fact that it is unclean. They say God does not wait for the sinner to become pure before He can save him but saves him just as He finds him if only the man desires, cries out for and supplicates salvation. If a man who

is suffering turns to God for help and relief in full faith that God can save him he is sure to be saved. That is what the scriptures say and what countless saints have declared. Christ said: “Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Fear not.” Lord Krishna said almost the same thing. When Arjuna, after hearing what Krishna had to say about all the different kinds of yoga which could secure Liberation, complained that he was confused by all these instructions and felt that he could not follow them, Krishna said: “Then give up all dharmas and take refuge only in Me. Grieve not. I will save you from all your sins.

What is demanded here is total surrender to God by throwing oneself completely on God’s Mercy and not desiring anything for oneself. Leaving everything to God the all-loving and all-knowing is not so easy as it may sound. However, the point I want to make here is that Grace is all-powerful and that even the law of karma by which, they say, a man must reap what he has sown, with no exception whatsoever, can be overcome. I am strongly inclined by temperament to believe this, and I believe that Bhagavan has confirmed it for me. I will quote here what I wrote on the subject on pages 100 and 101 of my little book *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*:

“Another point on which I more than once argued with Bhagavan is the extent to which Grace can override *prarabdha* or destiny. My main line of argument throughout was (and my conviction now as ever is) that God is all-powerful and that nothing is impossible for Him, and that if one got and could get only what one had worked for and merited, there would be no place at all for Grace. Most often Bhagavan remained silent when I indulged in such arguments either by myself or with others, some of whom took my side and others the opposite side; but from various remarks and observations that he made on different occasions I have come to the conclusion that the following is his attitude in the matter: ‘Of course, nothing is impossible to God, but everything happens

according to the order established by God's will or plan and exceptions are very few. How many Markandeyas, are there in our Puranas?

“On the other hand, many authoritative books have clearly said (and Bhagavan has quoted them with approval) that one look from a *Jnani* can save us from the effects of all our karmas, past or present, *prarabdha* included. And Sri Janaki Matha has published in her Tamil journal that when she discussed this question once with Bhagavan, maintaining that His Grace can help one even to overcome *prarabdha*, he told her: ‘If you have such faith it will be so.’ “

I find that I cannot usefully add anything to this quotation, but I should perhaps explain the reference to Markandeya. It is said in the Puranas that Markandeya was destined to live for only sixteen years and that he prayed to Siva and received the boon that he would be perpetually sixteen. Bhagavan mentioned it to stress his point that the obvious and spectacular intervention of Divine Grace is very exceptional.

It is said in the Upanishads that one cannot say when or why or to whom Grace will come. It is said that it will fall only on him whom it chooses. A hundred might make the effort and yet only one or two of them might be chosen. No one can predict anything about Grace except that it is unpredictable.

It will be interesting here to turn to the following quotations from Paul Brunton given in my book *Day by Day with Bhagavan*.

“Divine Grace is a manifestation of the cosmic free will in operation. It can alter the course of events in a mysterious manner through its own unknown laws, which are superior to all natural laws, and can modify the latter by interaction. It is the most powerful force in the universe.

“It descends and acts only when it is invoked by total self-surrender. It acts from within, because God resides in the Heart of all beings. Its whisper can be heard only in a mind purified by self-surrender and prayer.”



The above two quotations were contained in a book called *Divine Grace Through Total Self-Surrender* by one D.C. Desai, and Bhagavan himself, on going through the book, read them out to us.

My saying that God's Grace is unpredictable and has power to remit sins and erase karma should not be taken to mean that this Grace can be obtained without effort. On the contrary, great effort is necessary. A man, recognising that he cannot raise himself by himself, must fall at the feet of God and cry: "Lord, I am weak and powerless. You alone can save me. I take refuge in You. Do what You will with me." This is the effort that must be made: an effort towards attainment of effortlessness after realising the uselessness of our own puny efforts.

Bhagavan has strongly commended the path of total self-surrender as a sure way to salvation and has called devotion the 'Mother of *Jnana*'. That well-known early devotee of Bhagavan, Sivaprakasam Pillai, for whom *Who am I?* was written, says in one of his poems: "To everyone you give only this instruction: 'Find out who you are.' If, after that, they humbly ask for more guidance, you tell them as your final word: 'There is a power which moves you and me and all others. Lay your ego at the feet of that Mother.' "

From various actions and remarks of Bhagavan I have not the slightest doubt that he regards the path of surrender as the best way for me. It is true that he maintained quite definitely that final Liberation is only possible through Knowledge of the Self, which is being the Self, because Knowing is Being; but that comes inevitably to one who has completely surrendered.

## 48. Sri Bhagavan's Love for Arunachala\*

When an earnest devotee took the liberty of challenging Bhagavan and asked: “Bhagavan! I do not want any metaphysical argument. Give me some tangible evidence. Is there God? Can you show me God?” Sri Bhagavan gave a broad smile and said: “What else do you think it is?” and pointed His fingers to the Holy Hill, Arunachala!

“Someone from abroad has asked for a stone from the holiest spot in Arunachala; perhaps, he doesn't know that every inch, every pebble, every grain of sand in Arunachala is holy,” Bhagavan joyously confirmed once!

These statements coming from the purest Advaitin – one “Established in the Bliss of indissoluble Union” – show how love matures into God-experience and God-experience makes the heart melt in love. With the mention of the mere name ‘Arunachala’ and with every look He had at the form ‘Arunachala’ Bhagavan melted with ecstasy! To this visible, tangible God He makes supreme self-surrender, and declares: “Let your will be my pleasure, Oh Arunachala!” (*Padikam*, v. 2). Sri Ramana, the living embodiment of Love, merged in that natural manifestation of Supreme Love, Arunachala. “As soon as You did claim me, my body and soul became Yours. What else can I desire?” (*Navamanimalai*, v. 7)

Love implies duality. Personal love is a double movement, to love and to be loved. Impersonal love surges from the Centre, yet remains in the Centre as the Centre: it has no periphery or circumference. There is no “other” to love or be loved. When one takes one's self to be a body, one takes another body as the “other”. But, when one is not limited to a body, That alone exists and That is Love, the *sphurana* within, the throbbing which is the movement of the Self towards the Self.

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\* Prof. K. Swaminathan, ‘Editorial’, *The Mountain Path*, July 1988.

Sri Bhagavan's love for Arunachala was thus at once impersonal, and yet charged with connotations intensely personal. Here is a grand example of Non-duality blossoming into duality to teach us all the presence of the many in the One as Love Supreme! His Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala reveal Sri Ramana as the master composer of the most moving bhakti songs. Our founder-editor of *The Mountain Path*, Arthur Osborne, an erudite scholar himself, asserted that the Marital Garland of Letters of Sri Bhagavan was "the greatest and most moving literary piece of poetry I have come across in the world's various religious texts." Bhagavan's love for Arunachala fills and overflows every verse of *Aksharamanamalai*, which "tells in glowing symbolism of the love and union between the human soul and God". Bride, son, friend, pupil, servant – Sri Ramana finds His bridegroom, Father, Guru, Master, in Arunachala-Siva.

A well-known incident illustrates the Son's willing surrender to the Father. When the image of Arunachala was being taken in procession round the Hill (*giripradakshina*), puja to It was performed in front of the Ashram gate. Bhagavan was then going towards the *gosala* and, noticing the puja, He sat on the pial near the tap by the side of the then Book Depot. The *aarti* (burning camphor) plate offered to Arunachaleswara was brought to Bhagavan. He took a little *Vibhuti* and applied it to His forehead, saying: "*Appaavukku pillai adakkam*" – "The Son is subject to the Father"!

Once when Muruganar asked Bhagavan to explain the significance of *Arunachala Giripradakshina*, the reply was: "Go round It yourself and find out for yourself!" Bhagavan often declined to elaborate the meaning of the verses in Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala. But once or twice He did spell out the meaning of Arunachala:

"*Aruna* = Red, bright like fire.

This is *jnana agni* (Fire of Wisdom)  
which is neither hot nor cool.

*Achala* = a hill.

*Arunachala* means ‘Hill of Wisdom’”

“*A*=Sat; *Ru*=Chit; *Na*=Ananda:

*A*=Siva; *Ru*=Jiva; *Na*=their Union.

Hence *Arunachala* – tat-twam-asi.”

Every syllable of the Holy Name is charged with a meaning and a message.

In another place He says: “People think It to be an insentient Hill. How do they know? It is the Self Itself in the shape of the Hill” In his *Ashtakam* (v. 1) He exclaims: “Hearken! ....

I realised that It meant Absolute Stillness!”

To Sri Bhagavan the great “experience” came first and expositions of it, He found later in books. This supreme experience He never hid from others. Though the sastras prohibit revealing higher spiritual knowledge to those not ready to receive it, Sri Bhagavan threw open and brightly lit up the Royal Path for the whole, wide world. He even begged Arunachala’s pardon for having done so: “I have revealed Your secrets. Be not offended, Arunachala!”

The compassion Bhagavan had for yearning souls was mingled with the intense love He had for Arunachala. ‘Ignorance’ and ‘Knowledge’ were mere words for Him, for He saw no *ajnana* except a temporary or partial absence of the light, the all-encompassing light of *Jnana*. In the one vast ocean of Love, concepts, dogmas, theories, all differences of high, low, big, small, learned, unlearned, ripe, unripe bore no significance for Him. The Love that filled Him as Arunachala *sphurana*, He shared with all, for what is Arunachala but Love embodied, solid, strong, the Love that moves the Sun and the stars and also shines as the Sun and the Moon, and makes every human heart blossom like the lotus? Arunagiri is at once the Mountain, Being, Sat; the Sun, Awareness, Chit; the ocean, Bliss, Ananda, grace, compassion, showers that bathe and bless our earth. Where is the secret here and why

not reveal it to all? Is the Self any one's private possession? It is the Self, the one universal Self, our own Self, that Sri Bhagavan 'gives' or 'brings' to us!

Firm as the Mountain, bright as the Sun, vast as the Ocean, the Self is Love as the sole Reality. The *Advaitin* is the only true lover, as he loves the Self which is the Self of all. Yet, in this phenomenal, *vyavahara*, world, He prays: "(Shine as) my Guru". Sri Bhagavan calling Arunachala as "my Guru" reveals the mystery of His accepting dualism in His *bhakti-grantha* (gospels of Devotion). He Himself justifies it in Supplement to Forty Verses, v. 39: "My son, the sense of non-duality may apply to the three worlds, but it is not to be used towards the Guru."

If Bhagavan, bhakta, pupil, son, bows before Arunachala, Bhagavan, the *Jnani*, speaks thus to a devotee: "The universe is like a painting on a screen – the screen being the Red Hill, Arunachala. That which rises, and sinks is made up of what it rises from. The finality of the universe is God Arunachala". He explains further how one has to link oneself with Arunachala by way of practical sadhana. "Meditating on Him (Arunachala) or on the screen, the Self, there is a mental vibration 'I' to which all are reduced. Tracing the source of 'I', the primal I-I alone remains over, and it is inexpressible. The seat of Realisation is within and the seeker cannot find it as an object outside Him. That seat is bliss and is the core of all beings. Hence it is called the Heart. The only useful purpose of the present birth is to turn within and realise it. There is nothing else to do."

Bhagavan Ramana is a perfect example of *nirguna jnana* issuing as *saguna bhakti*. His absolute surrender to Arunachala and His praises of Arunachala as God are quite consistent with His definition of Arunachala as "the Self within". The pure *Advaitin's* way of showing that the Self is Love is to act as the Lover loving all other manifestations of the Self.

The following dialogue between Dr. Hafiz Syed and Sri Bhagavan explains how down the ages the Hill of Dawn has stood as a symbol of the Self:

D.: I have been reading the Fine Hymns to Sri Arunachala. I find that the hymns are addressed to Arunachala by you. You are an *Advaitin*. How do you then address God as a separate Being?

B.: The devotee, God, the Hymns are all the Self.

D.: But you are addressing God. You are specifying this Arunachala Hill as God.

B.: You can identify the Self with the body. Should not the devotee identify the Self with Arunachala?

D.: If Arunachala be the Self why should it be specially picked out among so many other hills? God is everywhere. Why do you specify Him as Arunachala?

B.: What has attracted you from Allahabad to this place? What has attracted all these people around?

D.: Sri Bhagavan.

B.: How was I attracted here? By Arunachala. The Power cannot be denied. Again Arunachala is within and not without. The Self is Arunachala.” (*Talks*, No. 228).

Love and Wisdom, bhakti and *jnana*, warmth and brightness, fill the following gem-like Hymn where the Bliss of the Universe is reflected in the heart-lotus as Love:

“Oh Arunachala! In Thee the picture of the universe is formed, has its stay, and is dissolved; this is the sublime Truth. Thou art the Inner Self, who dancest in the Heart as I. ‘Heart’ is Thy name, Oh Lord!” (*Five Stanzas to Sri Arunachala*, v.2).

### 49. Broken Pieces of Thosai (Dosa)\*

This happened long long ago when Sri Bhagavan was in what was later known as the Golden Jubilee Hall.

My wife had prepared in my house rice flour enough to prepare a hundred thosais (dosas, rice-cakes). At about 12 noon, she had put the iron pan over the oven and was going to print the first ladle of flour over the pan and spread it evenly. Gratified at the love with which she was preparing these to be taken and offered to Sri Maharshi, I said in an ecstatic mood, “All broken pieces of thosai must be offered to Chokkanathar”. Of course, I had in mind the story of the old woman (Puttu Variichi) and Chokkanatha of *Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam* equating Bhagavan Sri Maharshi with Chokkanatha Swami (the Lord in Madurai Meenakshi temple). As if it were the result of my utterance, every one of the thosais that my wife prepared broke and not one came off whole. My wife and I were greatly surprised to see the heap of the one hundred cakes all in broken pieces. We gathered the whole thing and carried to Sri Maharshi, of course with enough chutney. It was about 2 o’ clock when we reached Sri Maharshi’s hall. He gave us a beaming smile, and asked us what it was that we carried with us. My wife told Sri Bhagavan the whole story and added that Chokkan must consume all the broken pieces.

Bhagavan said, “Chokkan must have the broken pieces,” stretched his hand and took a big handful of the broken pieces of thosai from the basket and put it on to a plate. My wife put enough chutney and Bhagavan had a hearty meal of it causing the remaining to be distributed amongst all the devotees that were there.

#### He was my remembrance

One fine morning, I was in the assembly of Sri Bhagavan’s devotees. Sri Bhagavan was expounding to us some remote

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\* T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, *The Call Divine*, September 1954.

point in philosophy. He went on talking till it was 10:45. We were all so much absorbed that we had no sense of time and space. At 10:45, Sri Bhagavan turned to me and said, “Why fellow, you have not left for the school yet?”

I said, “Why Bhagavan, it is Sunday today.”

Bhagavan gave a broad laugh and said, “It is a funny way you do your school work. It is Monday today. Run up. Your Headmaster is waiting there at the gate looking for you to come.”

So I hurried up and reached school exactly at the stroke of the recess bell. As I reached the gates, I found the Headmaster standing at the gates of the school with his usual pinch of snuff in his hand, his eyes turned towards the path to the temple eagerly expecting me to come. As I neared him, he said in a serious mood the same as Sri Maharshi said, “Why Sir, you have forgotten that it is Monday and perhaps you required the Maharshi to remind you that today is a working day.”

And I answered neatly, “Too true Sir, I did forget and Sri Maharshi sent me for duty.” And my Headmaster laughed a hearty laugh and answered, “Go to your classroom.”

### **Introduction to *Ramana Nool Thirattu***

It was about 1927 that Sri Bhagavan’s collected Tamil works were under preparation for publication. There was a talk among the pundits of the Ashram that the book must have a preface, although the devotees of Maharshi considered that nobody was qualified to write out a preface to Maharshi’s works. Though the pundits proposed writing out a preface, none of them came forward to write, each one excusing himself that he was not qualified for the task. It was a drama of several hours, one proposing the other for the purpose and each declining. Sri Maharshi was watching all this.

At about 10:30 in the night as I was passing the way of the hall, Sri Bhagavan looked at me and said, “Why not you write the preface yourself?”



I was taken aback at Bhagavan's proposal but meekly said, "I would venture to write if I had Bhagavan's blessings in the task." Bhagavan said, "Do, and it will come alright."

So I began writing at the dead of night, and, to my great surprise within three quarters of an hour, I wrote out a draft as if impelled and driven by some Supreme Force. I altered no comma of it and at 2 o'clock early morning, I placed it at the feet of Bhagavan. He was happy to see the arrangements of the contents and the simplicity of the expressions. He passed it on as being alright, and asked me to take it away. But as I went away a few steps with the written sheets of paper, Sri Maharshi beckoned to me to produce the sheets once again. I had concluded the preface in the following tenet: "It is hoped that this work in the form of Bhagavan's Grace or Prasada will give to all aspirants after eternal truth, the liberation in the form of *Paramananda prapthi* which is in the shape of *sarva dukka nivarini*."

Maharshi said "Why have you put 'it is hoped?' Why not say 'It is certain?'" So saying he corrected my "Nambugirane" (hoped) into "tinnam" (certain) with His own hands. Thus Maharshi set his seal of approval to the book and gave his devotees the great charter of liberation in the form of His *Upadesa* which leaves no trace of doubt about it.

## 50. The Path of Enquiry\*

Self-enquiry is not analysis; it has nothing in common with philosophy or psychology. The Maharshi showed this when he declared that no answer the mind gives can be right. (And, indeed, in this it resembles a Zen koan.) If it had a mental answer it would be a philosophical conundrum, not a spiritual practice; and it was as a spiritual practice that

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\* Arthur Osborne, an excerpt from 'The Maharshi's Place in History', *The Mountain Path*, July 1968.

the Maharshi prescribed it. So anyone who tells you what the answer to the enquiry is shows by that very fact that he has not understood it. It does not mean arguing or saying that I am not this or not that; it means concentrating on the pure sense of being, the pure I-am-ness of me. And this, one discovers, is the same as pure consciousness, pure, formless awareness.

So far is it from being a mental practice that the Maharshi told us not to concentrate on the head while doing it but on the heart. By this he did not mean the physical heart at the left side of the chest but the spiritual Heart on the right. This is not a physical organ and also not a yogic or *tantric chakra*; but it is the centre of our sense of being. The Maharshi told us so and those who have followed his instructions in meditation have found it to be so. The ancient Hebrews knew of it: “The wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart is at his left,” it says in the Bible. It is referred to also in that ancient *Advaitic* scripture, the *Yoga Vasishtha*, in verses which the Maharshi quoted as Nos. 22-27 in his Supplementary Forty Verses on Reality. Concentration on the Heart does not mean thinking about the heart but being aware in and with the Heart. After a little practice it sets up a current of awareness that can actually be felt physically though far more than physical. At first this is felt in the heart, sometimes in the heart and head and connecting them. Later it pervades and transcends the body. Perhaps it could be said that this current of awareness is the ‘answer’ to the question ‘Who am I?’, since it is the wordless experience of I-ness.

There should be regular times for this ‘meditation’, since the mind accustoms itself and responds more readily. I have put the word ‘meditation’ in inverted single quotes, since it is not meditation in the usual sense of the word but only concentration on Self or on being. As Bhagavan explained: “Meditation requires an object to meditate on, whereas in Self-enquiry there is only the subject and no object.” Good times are first thing when you wake up in the morning and

last thing before going to sleep at night. At first a good deal of time and effort may be needed before the current of awareness is felt; later it begins to arise more and more easily. It also begins to occur spontaneously during the day, when one is not meditating. That explains Bhagavan's saying that one should keep up the enquiry constantly, not only during meditation. It comes to be more and more constant and, when lost or forgotten, to need less and less reawakening.

A man has three modes of manifestation: being, thinking and doing. Being is the most fundamental of the three, because he can't think or do unless he first is. But it is so covered over by the other two that it is seldom experienced. It could be compared to the cinema screen which is the support for the pictures without which they could not be seen, but which is so covered over with them that it is not ordinarily noticed. Only very occasionally, for a brief glimpse, does the spiritually untrained person experience the sheer fact of being; and when he does he recalls it afterwards as having been a moment of pure happiness, pure acceptance, pure rightness. Self-enquiry is the direct approach to conscious being, and therefore it is necessary to suspend thinking and doing while practising it. It may lead to a state when conscious (instead of the previous unconscious) being underlies thinking and doing; but at first they would interrupt it, so they have to be held off.

This is the path; the doctrine on which it is based is Advaita, non-duality, which might be rendered 'Identity' or 'No-otherness'. Its scripture for the Maharshi's followers is his Forty Verses on Reality together with the Supplementary Forty Verses which he later added.

In this he declares: "All religions postulate the three fundamentals; the world, the individual and God."

Not all in a formal way, for there are also non-theistic religions; but essentially this is what we start from. Whether I am educated or uneducated, my own existence is the basis from which I start, the direct awareness to which everything else is added. Then, outside myself, my mind and senses

report a world of chairs and tables and trees and sky, and other people in it.

Mystics tell me that all this is illusion, and nowadays nuclear scientists agree with them. They say that the red book I am holding is just a cluster of electrons whirling about at high speed, that its redness is just the way my optic apparatus interprets a vibration of a certain wavelength, and similarly with its other qualities; but anyway, that is how it presents itself to my perception. I also have a feeling of some vastness, some power, some changeless Reality behind the vulnerability of the individual and the mutability of the world. It is about this third factor that people disagree, some holding that it is the real Self of the individual, others that it is a Being quite other than him and others again that it does not exist at all.

The verse continues: “But it is only the One Reality that manifests as these three.” This implies that Self-enquiry is the quest for the one Reality underlying the apparent trinity of individual, world and God.

But the mistake inherent in dualism does not consist in supposing that God is a separate Being from you but in supposing that you are a separate being from God. It is not belief in God that is wrong but belief in the ego. Therefore, the verse continues: “One can say, ‘The three are really three only so long as the ego lasts’.” Then the verse turns to the practical conclusion, as Bhagavan always did in his teaching: “Therefore, to abide in one’s own Being, where the ‘I’ or ego is dead is the perfect State.”

And that is what one is trying to do by Self-enquiry: to abide as the Self, the pure Being that one essentially is, casting aside the illusory reality of the ego.

Feeling one’s insignificance before that mighty Power, one may worship It in one of Its manifestations, as Krishna, say, or Christ or Rama, but: “Under whatever name and form one may worship the Absolute Reality, it is only a means for realising It without name and form.” That means appreciating Its Infinity, realising that It alone is, and leaves no room for

a separate me subsisting apart from It. Therefore, the verse continues: “That alone is true Realisation wherein one knows oneself in relation to that Reality, attains peace and realises one’s identity with It.”

And this is done by Self-enquiry. “If the first person, I, exists, then the second and third persons, you and he, also exist. By enquiring into the nature of the I, the I perishes. With it, ‘you’ and ‘he’ also perish.” However, that does not mean blank annihilation; it only means annihilation of the illusion of separate identity, that is to say of the ego which is the source of all suffering and frustration. Therefore, the verse continues: “The resultant state, which shines as Absolute Being, is one’s own natural state, the Self.”

Not only is this not a gloomy or dismal state or anything to be afraid of, but it is the most radiant happiness, the most perfect bliss. “For him who is immersed in the bliss of Self-realisation arising from the extinction of the ego what more is there to achieve? He does not see anything as being other than the Self. Who can apprehend his State?”

Note that in speaking of the unutterable bliss of Self-realisation Bhagavan says that it is achieved through the extinction of the ego, that is the apparent individual identity. So that, although nothing is lost, something does have to be offered in sacrifice; and while being offered it appears a terrible loss, the supreme loss, one’s very life; only after it has been sacrificed does one discover that it was nothing and that all has been gained, not lost. This means that understanding alone cannot constitute the path. Whatever path may be followed, in whatever religion, the battle must be fought and the sacrifice made. Without that a man can go on all his life proclaiming that there is no ego and yet remain as much a slave to the ego as ever. Although the Forty Verses on Reality is a scripture of the Path of Knowledge, Bhagavan asks in it: “If, since you are a single being, you cannot see yourself, how can you see God?” And he goes on to answer: “Only by being devoured by Him.”

This brings the path of enquiry to the same point as the path of surrender, since in either case the ego must be sacrificed. It is a very profound verse. It recalls the Hebrew saying: “No man can see God and live.” Many people see visions of God in one form or another, but that is not seeing God. The mind and senses of a man knot themselves together into what wrongly supposes itself to be an individual entity separate from the Universal Being which it aspires to see. But that Universal Being is the true Self of it. Only by surrendering their illusory individual entity to be devoured out of existence can the mind and senses become true instruments for perception by what is thereafter understood to be their true Self, so that, as the Maharshi sometimes said, the only way to see God is to be God.

### 51. Visit of a Moulvi from Peshawar\*

**W**e were sitting one morning in the hall in deep meditation. Suddenly there was the sound of the tap-tap of a stick. A tall blind Muslim was trying to find the entry to the hall with his stick. I helped him to come inside. He asked me in Urdu where Bhagavan was sitting. I made him sit right in front of Bhagavan and told him, “You are now sitting just in front of Bhagavan. You can salute him.” The Muslim told his story. He lived near Peshawar and he was a moulvi (teacher) of repute. Once he happened to hear somebody reading in Urdu about Bhagavan and at once he felt that Bhagavan was his spiritual father and that he must go to him. Blind as he was, he took the next train and travelled thousands of miles all alone, changing trains many times, till at last he reached Ramanasramam. When asked what he was going to do next, he said. “Whatever Bhagavan tells me, I shall do.” His immense faith made me ashamed of myself. How little did the

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\* Chalam, *Ramana Smriti*, 1980.

man hesitate to place his life in the hands of a South Indian swami? And what a mountain of doubts and hesitations I had to wade through before I came to Bhagavan's feet in earnest!

## 52. Outside the Scriptures\*

A special transmission outside the scriptures;  
 No dependence upon words or letters;  
 Direct pointing at the Heart of man;  
 Seeing into one's own nature, and the attainment of Liberation.

These are the reflections of a traveller on the *Mountain Path* laid down by the Maharshi.

The Maharshi's wordless doctrine is unlike the usual traditional teachings. There are no creeds to be elaborated, so there is no need for preaching. There is nothing for the mind to theorize or philosophize about. What is needed is immediate, intuitive understanding of the heart. "The intricate maze of philosophy of the various schools is said to clarify matters and to reveal the Truth, but in fact it creates confusion where none need exist. To understand anything there must be the Self. The Self is obvious. So why not remain as the Self? What need to explain the non-self?"†

What the seeker has to do is rather to unlearn and let go all his preconceived ideas about the Self. Indeed, the Maharshi has been known to say that in the end even the scriptures must be given up and unlearned. "All scriptures without exception proclaim that for attaining salvation the mind should be subdued. And once one knows that control of the mind is their final aim, it is futile to make an interminable study of them. What is required for such control is actual enquiry into oneself by self-interrogation: 'Who am I?' How

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\* Dr. T.N. Krishnaswami, *The Mountain Path*, January 1964.

† *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, p. 15, Rider's edition, p. 10, Sri Ramanasramam edition.

can this enquiry in quest of the Self be made by means of a study of the scriptures?”\*

This reminds one of Chuang Tsu’s saying that if one gets rid of small wisdom great wisdom comes in. There are no precepts for special austerities, while at the same time indulgence is not condoned. The question always is: who is it that seeks all this. To refer a second time to a Taoist Sage, it is like Lee Tsu’s story of the animal trainer who subdued his tigers (the *vasanas*) by treating them quite impersonally, neither gratifying their desires nor provoking their anger.

All thinking is out of place as a means of sadhana. It is not one’s true nature. It creates all errors and, what is worst of all, creates, as the father of them a false entity, the ego or individual being. “Concentration is not thinking of one thing. On the contrary it is excluding all thoughts, since all thoughts obstruct the sense of one’s true being. All efforts are to be directed simply to removing the veil of ignorance.”†

The Maharshi says that the Self is not in books; if it were anybody might become a Sage by study. Also it is not in any hermitage, and going to live in solitude will not help. “Why do you think you are a householder? The similar thought that you are a sannyasin will haunt you even if you go forth as one. Whether you continue in the household or renounce it and go to live in the forest, your mind haunts you. The ego is the source of thought. It creates the body and the world and makes you think of being a householder. If you renounce it, it will only substitute the thought of renunciation for that of family and the environment of the forest for that of the household. But the mental obstacles are always there for you. They even increase greatly in the new surroundings. Change of environment is no help. The one obstacle is the mind and this must be overcome whether in the home or in the forest. If you can do it in the forest, why not in the home? So why

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\* *ibid.*, p 57.

† *ibid.*, p. 127.



change the environment? Your efforts can be made even now, whatever be the environment.”\*

Nor is the Self something to be attained at some future date. “No one is ever away from his Self, and therefore everyone is in fact Self-realised; only – and this is the great mystery – people do not know this and want to realise the Self. Realisation consists only in getting rid of the false idea that one is not realised. It is not anything new to be acquired. It must already exist or it would not be eternal, and only what is eternal is worth striving for.”†

All doctrines are made by the ego and for the ego. The ego flourishes on them. But on the Maharshi’s path the very existence of the ego is denied right from the start, both that of the teacher and that of the taught. “There is no ego. If there were you would have to admit of two selves in you. Therefore, there is no ignorance. If you enquire into the Self, ignorance, which is already non-existent, will be found not to exist and you will say that it has fled.”‡

Is there anything in the human body that can be called ‘I’? There are mental and vital processes but investigation reveals no person there to be designated as ‘I’.§

The negative process consists of intellectually eliminating the not-I so that one can see that he who eliminates everything else cannot eliminate himself. Such intellectual investigation may prepare the way for Self-enquiry but is not the enquiry itself.

Visitor: “I begin with asking myself ‘Who am I? ‘and eliminate the body as not-I, the breath as not-I, the mind as not-I, but then I am unable to proceed further.”

Bhagavan: “Well, that is all right so far as the mind goes. Your process is only mental. The Truth cannot be directly

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\* *ibid.*, p. 78/94.

† *ibid.*, p. 23/21

‡ *ibid.*, p. 25/23.

§ It will be observed that this is the same as the Buddhist doctrine of ‘anatta’. (Editor)

indicated; that is why this mental process is used. You see, he who eliminates all the not-I cannot eliminate the ‘I’. In order to be able to say ‘I am not this’, or ‘I am That’ there must be the ‘I’ to say it. This ‘I’ is only the ego or the I-thought. After the rising up of this I-thought all other thoughts arise. The I-thought is therefore the root thought. If the root is pulled out the rest is at the same time uprooted. Therefore, seek the root ‘I’; question yourself: ‘Who am I?’; find out the source of the ‘I’. Then all these problems will vanish and the pure Self alone will remain.”\*

Why was the Maharshi so against thought? Why was he not satisfied with mental investigation? Because it cannot see beyond itself. It is created by the ego and therefore cannot pierce to the Self underlying the ego. But will its renunciation not result in a mere blank? It can; that is what happens in deep sleep. But it can also result in awakening into pure *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, Being-Consciousness-Bliss. This is what is called Realisation. “Absence of thought does not mean a blank. There must be someone to be aware of that blank. Knowledge and ignorance pertain only to the mind and are in duality, but the Self is beyond them both. It is pure Light. There is no need for one Self to see another. There are no two selves. What is not Self is mere non-Self and cannot see the Self. The Self has no sight or hearing; it lies beyond them, all alone, as pure Consciousness.”†

Then does one who has realised the Self remain absorbed in pure, formless Consciousness, oblivious of any outer world? He can; that is the state of trance known as *nirvikalpa samadhi*. But he need not. Full and complete Realisation involves return to formal consciousness also, with full perception of the outer world, not as a self-subsistent reality but as a manifestation of the Self. The mind and senses can still cognize; when one says that the mind is dead, that means

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\* *ibid.*, p. 116.

† *ibid.*, p. 15.

only that it no longer presumes to imagine, create or originate, as it formerly did. This is the state the Maharshi was in. It is known as *sahaja samadhi*. “To those who have not realised the Self, as well as to those who have, the word ‘I’ refers to the body, but with this difference, that, for those who have not realised, the I ‘is confined to the body, whereas, for those who have realised the Self within the body, the ‘I’ shines as the limitless Self. “To those who have not realised as well as to those who have, the world is real. But to those who have not realised Truth is adapted to the measure of the world, whereas to those who have, Truth shines as the Formless Perfection and as the Substratum of the world. This is all the difference between them.”\*

Why is the Maharshi so insistent against the ego? Because the ego is the usurper that claims to be the Self, the mask that conceals the Reality. Its elimination is the only way to realisation of the true Self that underlies it. The seeker has no alternative. There can be no chick unless the egg-shell is broken. The true Self cannot be realised until the false is renounced. Therefore, the Maharshi says, since this is ultimately necessary, why not start with it straight away; since you must finally remain as the Self, why not do so from the start; since other paths will lead you roundabout and finally face you with the alternative of Self or pseudo-self, why not go direct and face it here and now? “This is the direct method.

All other methods are practiced while retaining the ego and therefore many doubts arise and the ultimate question still remains to be tackled in the end. But in this method the final question is the only one and is raised from the very beginning... Because every kind of path except Self-enquiry presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for following it, and cannot be followed without the mind. The

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\* ‘Forty Verses on Reality’, vv. 17-18, from *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*.

ego may take different and subtler forms at different stages of one's practice but it is never destroyed. The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind by methods other than Self-enquiry is like a thief turning policeman to catch the thief that is himself. Self-enquiry alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists and enable one to realise the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or the Absolute.”\*

Many hesitate and find this method too harsh; because of all renunciations this seems to them the most severe, renouncing not merely enjoyment but him who desires and enjoys it. But this is a wrong idea. If it were true, a Self-realised man such as the Maharshi would be the most miserable of men, whereas in fact he is the happiest, in pure, unbroken, unalloyed happiness, regardless of whether outer circumstances seem favourable or unfavourable.

This is because in renouncing the ego one really renounces nothing except a wrong conception of ‘I’, an error whose removal reveals the eternal Truth and unalloyed happiness that is one's real nature. “The individual being which identifies its existence with that of the life in the physical body as ‘I’ is called the ego. The Self, which is pure Consciousness, has no ego-sense about it. Neither can the physical body, which is inert in itself, have this ego-sense.

Between the two, that is between the Self or pure Consciousness and the inert physical body, there arises mysteriously the ego-sense or ‘I’-notion, the hybrid which is neither of them, and this flourishes as an individual being. The ego or individual being is at the root of all that is futile and undesirable in life. Therefore, it is to be destroyed by any possible means; then That, whichever is, alone remains resplendent. This is Liberation or Enlightenment or Self-Realisation.”†

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\* *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His own words*, p.110.

† *ibid.*, p. 10.

It is to remove this error that the Maharshi prescribes the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ from the very start. He had no graded methods. Nor did he grade his disciples according to seniority. Progress was an inner state which only he perceived. The aspirant is expected to understand that he does not know his real Self, to investigate into it in order to find out what it really is. He must see: “I am possessed of a wrong view of ‘I’. I am a slave of a pseudo-I. I should not take him for the real ‘I’ or lend him that name. This tragedy of wrong thinking has brought on me the sickness of a wrong I. The Maharshi has prescribed the right medicine to cure me. I am under the spell of the ego which has hypnotized and enslaved me. I myself gave it the power to do so by thoughtlessly bestowing my I-sense on it. By doing so I am helping it to rob me of my very Self.” Indeed, the Maharshi often referred to the story of King Janaka who, on attaining Realisation, exclaimed: “Now I have caught the thief who has been robbing me all these years!”

Why do I thus misplace my I-sense? Because I take sense-perceptions for true. I have to learn to realise the true ‘I’ which underlies mind and senses and the whole objective world.

Man’s mind and senses are used to cognize objective things, but this talent is of no use for knowing the Self, in which there is no trace of objectivity. One cannot have a vision of the Self or know the Self as one knows another, because that would imply two selves in you, one to know the other.

“You speak of a vision of Siva, but a vision always presumes an object. That implies the existence of a subject. The value of the vision is the same as that of the seer. That is to say the nature of the vision is on the same plane as that of the seer.”\* “A vision of God is only a vision of the Self objectified as the God of your particular faith. What you have

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\* *ibid.*, p. 171.

to do is to know the Self.”\* And to know the Self is only to know, to be aware, to be.

Devotee: When I seek the ‘I’, I see nothing.

Bhagavan: You say that because you are accustomed to identify yourself with the body and sight with the eyes, but what is there to be seen? And by whom? And how? There is only one Consciousness and this, when it identifies itself with the body, projects itself through the eyes and sees the surrounding objects. The individual is limited to the waking state; he expects to see something different and accepts the authority of his senses. He will not admit that he who sees, the objects seen and the act of seeing are all manifestations of the same Consciousness – the ‘I-I’. Self-enquiry helps to overcome the illusion that the Self is something to see. How do you recognize yourself now? Do you have to hold a mirror up in front of yourself to recognize yourself? The awareness is itself the ‘I’. Realise it and that is the truth.”† However the ego is engrossed with seeing, hearing, feeling and objective knowing. It values these functions and considers them as belonging to the Self. Blinded by this view, one does not experience the brilliance of the true ‘I’. One’s attention is to be drawn away from such objective perceptions to That with respect to which there is unknowingness.‡ If That were known and experienced as It is, It would be recognized as one’s very Self, and then the false ‘I’ would fade out. The outer man is unreal and should be made passive, a mere recipient of impressions. Self-enquiry helps to do this. The journey is inwards through territory unknown to the senses.

So long as life remains one should strive to reach one’s source. This is the only worthy aim in life, the only goal worth seeking, the only use of life that can put an end

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\* *ibid.*, 173.

† *ibid.*, p.14.

‡ This expression recalls the title of the 14th Century English mystic’s guide to aspirants, ‘The Cloud of Unknowing. (Editor)

to suffering and frustration and reveal the pure Bliss, the radiant Consciousness, the unruffled Being that one really is. The weapon for doing this, on the Maharshi's path, is concentration on the I-sense. This is not like other thoughts that come and go and can be dismissed at will. One's attention must be constantly drawn to feeling of pure awareness, pure consciousness of I-am-ness.

At first this can be done only during concentrated sessions of Self-enquiry known loosely as 'meditation' but later the awareness of I-am-ness becomes an undercurrent underlying all one's activities. This I-sense is the scent by tracing which to its source one reaches the Self, as a dog tracks out its master.

'Am I worse than a dog? Steadfastly will I track Thee out and regain Thee Oh Arunachala'.

(First of the 'Five Hymns to Arunachala,' verse 39.)\*

The Maharshi says that if one earnestly seeks the 'I', the false 'I' vanishes, leaving only the true to shine in all its pristine glory. His teaching is based on his own experience not on learning or reasoning, and nothing he says is for the sake of argument. What can be more heartening to the traveller on the *Mountain Path*!

### 53. Companionship with Bhagavan†

Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, the well-known early disciple of Bhagavan Ramana, familiarly known as Nayana, once lived for four months in a small tiled room facing the Ganapati Temple of Palakkothu in the year 1929. I had the rare privilege of sharing his room and serving him, immersed in the spiritual aura of that great tapasvin and yogi. He was a very simple man with few physical wants, so it was a pleasure

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\* *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi.*

† Viswanathan, *The Mountain Path*, January 1966.

to serve him. It involved no physical or mental strain at all. Having a natural inner poise, he was always relaxed, despite his brilliance and quick wit. Everyone felt the warmth of his friendliness and the air of purity and peace about him.

It was no wonder therefore that Bhagavan Ramana, despite his equal vision, had some special regard and love for him. This expressed itself in many ways. During these early years Bhagavan used to go alone, without an attendant, for his short afternoon stroll past Palakkothu and often dropped in to sit for a few minutes with Nayana. It was neither what Bhagavan did nor what he said that mattered, it was his glorious presence that shone above all. Yet the familiarity with which he moved with his intimate devotees was heart-warming.

Bhagavan was opposed to any sort of waste or extravagance. “How do you light the fire in your charcoal stove?” he asked me one day. I told him that I used a bit of old rag rolled up and dipped in kerosene. Smilingly he scolded me for wasting kerosene when the fire could easily be lit with some of the dry twigs and leaves lying around or with bits of waste paper.

On another occasion he saw some small bits of paper, about one inch by six, lying on the floor of Nayana’s room and asked him if they were of any use to him. Nayana replied that they were waste pieces that he had cut off in cutting some sheets of paper to the required size. Bhagavan said: “I can stitch these pieces together and make a little notebook the size of a thumb and use it for writing something or other in.” Nayana beamed with pleasure at this economy; but I, to save Bhagavan the trouble, offered to do it myself and to make use of the paper. Perceiving my motive, Bhagavan said: “All right, but you are to show me the stitched note-book and the use you make of it.” On my undertaking to do so Bhagavan dropped the matter, as he had confidence in my sincerity.

As soon as Bhagavan had left I made a tiny notebook out of the bits of paper and wrote down in it the 108 slokas of the



*Indra Sahasra, Nama Stotra* and its seven concluding verses composed by Ganapati Muni in 1929.\*

Bhagavan appreciated the deep spiritual significance of these names as they were read out to him during the composition of the work and even before. So next morning when I showed Bhagavan the tiny notebook with the *Indra Sahasranama* written in it in small script, he scrutinized, as was his way,<sup>†</sup> not only the contents but the stitching and general appearance as well and then exclaimed with pleasure: “You have kept your promise and made the best use of the bits of paper.” I somehow lost that precious note-book handled and perused by Bhagavan. I need not say how glad I shall be if this lost treasure is found and restored for the benefit of all.

The present Ashram buildings had not yet been erected and Bhagavan was living in a thatched hut adjoining his Mother’s Samadhi (Shrine). Nayana used to sit in the presence of Bhagavan for about two hours daily, before and after sunset. This is a part of the day known as *pradosha* in Sanskrit and traditionally held sacred to the worship of Siva. But for Bhagavan and Nayana there was no special time of worship since they were perpetually flaming with tapas transcending time and space.

One evening Nayana asked Bhagavan about the forests which at that time still existed on and around Arunachala, saying that he had been in forests in other parts of India but not here. Bhagavan, full of benevolence, at once offered to take him to the forests on a fine day and said with a radiant, almost boyish smile, “Nayana, there is no inch of ground all over Arunachala that has not been trodden by these feet during

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\* The thousand names of Indra culled from the Rig Veda. Nayana composed his litany of these, adding no other words. ‘Indra’ refers here, of course, to the Supreme Being, not to the Indra of the Puranas who rises to a godly state by merit and again falls from it.)

† Bhagavan was extremely observant. Even on receiving a letter he would examine the envelope with address, postmark and stamps before opening it.

the time when I was living on the hill, especially during the Virupaksha period. I have been up the hills and down the dales and roamed about the interior regions where no forest guard would dare to go.”

One cloudy day, a few days later, I went to Bhagavan after lunch as usual. He was sitting alone. As soon as he saw me he asked what Nayana was doing and whether it would suit him to go for a walk in the forest. I replied that Nayana was writing something but would jump with joy and gladly drop it if he heard of Bhagavan’s proposal. “Go and tell him, then, and be ready,” Bhagavan said. “I will slip out of the Ashram unobserved (to avoid a crowd) and meet you near your room.”

Bhagavan joined us a few minutes later and the three of us wended our way towards the forest, led of course by Bhagavan, the born leader through uncharted regions, physical as well as spiritual. We entered the second forest path, cutting through the cattle-fair ground west of Palakkothu and the beautiful little temple of Draupadi with an arresting atmosphere about it. Thence Bhagavan took us to the third forest path, skirting the slopes of Arunachala at varying heights. It was dense forest with creepers entwining the trees and bushes. There were a few streams, some of them flowing and some dried up. As we proceeded along the winding, rugged path, enjoying the beauty of the scenery and the ever-changing aspects of the changeless Arunachala, the clouds cleared away and let the sunlight in for a few minutes. Knowing that Nayana could not stand the heat of the sun on his head, Bhagavan took us to a spreading tree standing at the edge of a forest pond and said: “See, Nayana, this is the tree known as *Ingudi* famous for its cooling shade and medicinal properties described in Sakuntala and other famous Sanskrit works. It is called *Nizhali* or *Nanjunda* in Tamil on account of its very cool shade which wards off the effects of the hot sun in no time.” And five minutes under the shade of the tree proved it to be so.

As soon as the clouds gathered over again, giving shade, Bhagavan took us deeper into the forest. Later he found a very pleasant place for us to rest, on the bed of a dried up stream, shaded by a huge rock to the west.

We did not speak much. One does not feel like disturbing the eloquent silence of Bhagavan in harmony with nature by indiscreet talk or even thought. He teaches in silence.

Time passed unnoticed in the gripping presence of the Lord of Silence until Nayana suggested that it was getting rather late for Bhagavan's return to the Ashram. Bhagavan said that we would wait for the afternoon breeze which would soon start up and make walking pleasant. A few minutes later the breeze did indeed start. At the same time, we heard the sound of someone moving through the bushes to the south and looking that way I saw Muruganar's head above the bushes and announced his presence with surprise.

Bhagavan, who was a marvellous actor, placed his finger along the side of his nose, as was his habit when surprised, and expressed his surprise that Muruganar could have penetrated so deep into the forest and discovered us. Muruganar had by this time caught sight of us and heard our voices, and a few minutes later he joined us and prostrated full length before Bhagavan, his face flushed with emotion. Bhagavan asked him how he had managed to find us out in this unfrequented spot where even a forest guard would find it hard to do so.

Muruganar explained in a voice choked with emotion that he was present when Nayana expressed his wish to see the forests and Bhagavan proposed a walk there and he decided not to miss the opportunity of accompanying Bhagavan deep into the heart of Arunachala. So since that day he had been daily coming to the Ashram as early as possible in the afternoon from the Temple of Arunachala where he was staying. That afternoon he had not found Bhagavan seated on his couch as usual when he came. The people at the Ashram had no knowledge of his whereabouts. Wasting no more time, he went straight to Nayana's room in Palakkothu but found

it locked. He enquired of the watchman who told him that earlier in the afternoon Nayana and I had been seen walking with Bhagavan in the direction of the cattle-fair ground. Some intuition made him choose the path he did, which brought him straight to Bhagavan.

We all three returned with Bhagavan to the Ashram unaware of anything but Bhagavan's Grace, the only Reality shining through all forms and movements and playing hide and seek with us all.

## 54. Some Reminiscences\*

After spending about twelve years in personal attendance on Bhagavan, I began to feel an urge to devote myself entirely to sadhana, spending my time all alone. However, I could not easily reconcile myself to the idea of giving up my personal service to Bhagavan. I had been debating the matter for some days when the answer came in a strange way. As I entered the hall one day I heard Bhagavan explaining to others who were there that real service to him did not mean attending to his physical needs but following the essence of his teaching: that is concentrating on realising the Self. Needless to say, that automatically cleared my doubts.

I therefore gave up my Ashram duties, but I then found it hard to decide how in fact I should spend the entire day in search of Realisation. I referred the matter to Bhagavan and he advised me to make Self-enquiry my final aim, but to practice Self-enquiry, meditation, *japa* and recitation of scripture turn by turn, changing over from one to another as and when I found the one I was doing irksome or difficult. In course of time, he said, the sadhana would become stabilised in Self-enquiry or pure Consciousness or Realisation.

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\* Kunju Swami, *The Mountain Path*, July 1966.

From my personal experience, as well as from that of others within my knowledge, I can say that before recommending any path to an aspirant Bhagavan would first find out from him what aspect, or form, or path he was naturally drawn to and then recommend him to follow it. He would sometimes endorse the traditional stages of sadhana, advancing from worship (puja) to incantation (*japa*), then to meditation (dhyana), and finally to Self-enquiry (*vichara*). However, he also used to say that continuous and rigorous practice of any one of these methods was adequate in itself to lead to Realisation. Thus, for instance, when one adopts the method of worship, say of the Sakti, one should, by constant practice and concentration, be able to see the Sakti everywhere and always and in everything and thus give up identification with the ego. Similarly, with *japa*. By constant and continuous repetition of a mantra one gets merged in it and loses all sense of separate individuality. In dhyana again, in constant meditation, with *bhavana* or deep feeling, one attains the state of *Bhavanatheeta*, which is only another name for pure Consciousness. Thus, any method, if taken earnestly and practised unremittingly, will result in elimination of the 'I' and lead to the goal of Realisation.

Once some awkward problems concerning Ashram management cropped up. Without being directly concerned, I was worried about them, as I felt that failure to solve them satisfactorily would impair the good name of the Ashram. One day, two or three devotees went to Bhagavan and put the problems before him. I happened to enter the hall while they were talking about them, and he immediately turned to me and asked me why I had come in at this time and why I was interesting myself in such matters. I did not grasp the meaning of his question, so Bhagavan explained that a person should occupy himself only with that purpose with which he had originally come to the Ashram and asked me what my original purpose had been. I replied: "To receive Bhagavan's Grace." So, he said: "Then occupy yourself with that only."

He further continued by asking me whether I had any interest in matters concerning the Ashram management when I first came here. On my replying that I had not, he added: “Then concentrate on the original purpose of your coming here.”

## 55. Sri Ramana the Divine Sage\*

Beautiful beyond all dreams, is the most enthralling inner life of the divine sage Sri Ramana. Its spiritual adventures and its divine achievements quicken higher aspirations and upward urges in the depths of our being, impart to us a sense of the significance of our life, give our existence a profound meaning and a great purpose, show its divine possibilities, illustrate its grand Goal, and what is more, point out the royal path reaching it even here on the terrestrial plane and in this very clay tenement. . .

The heavenly beauties and the ethereal glories of his transcendent life, the divine life, are revealed only to those who have “eyes to see those who have faith in him, pray to him, adore him in thought and spirit can sense and feel them and those who are absolutely pure and ripe enough to live his life can experience them. The very thought of Sri Ramana in a noble heart induces an attitude of adoration and beckons it to his view and ways of life, Sri Ramana is an eternal invitation to consummate perfection; he is the Call Divine.

For a realisation of the Self, for becoming like him, the greatest message Sri Ramana gave to aspiring and enlightened mankind is an individual enquiry of ‘Who am I?’ . Self realisation or an experience of the omnipresent Reality must always follow a preparatory peeping into the inner regions of our deeps, a heroic battling of our way into the very meaning and source of life, a burning love and a consuming zeal for the

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\* Sri Swami Sivananda, *Call Divine*, January 1953, pp. 146-8.

attainment of the divine light and grace; otherwise one is sure to lose one's way in false paths and face defeat, disillusion and madness. So an enquiry after the subjective centre, that Real Man, the metaphysical entity that is lurking dormant in the heart of the intellectual, vital and physical encasements of every individual, is the first step.

But the introspective cognition of the Self by the self becomes possible and flowers into the most effective operative power only after a certain necessary period of successful psychological training and discipline of the entire man. By conscious exercise of the power of the will, in the light of knowledge acquired after a profound study of *prasthanathraya* and of experience, one has to throw out secret thoughts, eliminate inner hankerings, overcome subtle desires, abandon selfish interests, and lift the soul out of all human passions and prejudices, predilections and cross purposes. This sadhana engenders in the aspirant an emptiness of the heart, stillness of the mind, a philosophic poise and a spiritual vision.

*Vichara*, the ever-present reflection on the why and wherefore of life and things; *Viveka*, the ever-present discrimination between the perishable and the Imperishable, the unreal and the Real; and *Vairagya*, the passionate revolt against selfishness and sensuality – these three constitute the life-belt, the wings and the eyes of every earnest seeker after Truth. Much of Sri Ramana's sadhana is occult and hidden from the ordinary view because his period of spiritual practice was covered in his previous births and it was only in this life that his revolutionary self-unfolding came to its acme. Without prolonged strenuous efforts of head, heart and hand, and continuous unique discipline involving thorough cleansing, education and illumination of self in past incarnations, so complete a Self-experience of Sri Ramana would have been impossible. Even in this last physical embodiment, he took resort to *Vichara*, *Viveka* and *Vairagya*. The characteristic pose of Sri Ramana, the 'mad man' who lost himself in the

transcendent joy of the divine Self, is a perpetual challenge to the pomp, glories and bliss of earthly kings and emperors. The extreme indifference of Sri Ramana to the thrills and wonders of the world gave us a measure of his empyrian greatness. A simple reflection on his philosophic poise, his perpetual peace, his inner spiritual joy, thrilled one into a possession of a new mind, a new heart and new eyes. The heights of discernment, the religious indifference, the profundity, the fullness, the grace his life exhibited, are comparable to those of Lord Dattatreya and Sri Dakshinamurti.

For contemporary humanity the life of Sri Ramana made the unseen a living Reality, the unknown a conscious experience. In him God became flesh; Truth found its fullest expression; the Self manifested itself in all its completeness. This great end is awaiting every living being. Sri Ramana is the spiritual destiny of every man. Self-expression by self-enquiry, self-knowledge and self-finding is the meaning and the goal of all conscious life. Sri Ramana is the call divine. He calls every aspirant unto himself, unto his perfection, unto his Realisation. As a seeker he struck the path, trod it, reached the divine destination, became what he beheld at that end, brought its beauties into earthly life and shared his infinite peace and joy with millions of souls groping in phenomenal ignorance, sorrow and sickness. May Sri Ramana's divine grace descend upon everyone more and yet more abundantly, to effect Self-knowledge and Self-illumination here and now!



## 56. The Power of Arunachala\*

### The Thought of Arunachala

By seeing Chidambaram, by being born, in Tiruvarur, by dying in Kasi, or by merely thinking of Arunachala, one will surely attain Liberation.

The supreme knowledge (Self-knowledge), the import of Vedanta, which cannot be attained without great difficulty, can easily be attained by anyone who sees the form of this hill from wherever it is visible or who even thinks of it by mind from afar.†

Such is the assurance given by Lord Siva in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam* about the power of the mere thought of Arunachala, and this assurance has received striking confirmation from the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

In the second line of the first verse of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam* Sri Bhagavan tells us that from his very earliest childhood, when he knew no other thing, Arunachala was shining his mind as the ‘most great’. And this thought of Arunachala so worked in his mind that at the age of sixteen a great fear of death arose in him and turned his mind Selfwards to drown forever in its source.

In his writings Sri Bhagavan has repeatedly confirmed the mysterious power that the thought of Arunachala has over the mind. In his Tamil *Collected Works*, under the picture of Arunachala, there is a verse that can be considered as his *dhyana sloka* (verse of contemplation) upon his *Sadguru*, Arunachala Siva; in this verse he sings, “This is Arunachala-Siva, the ocean of grace that bestows liberation when thought of”. In the first verse of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*

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\* Michael James, *The Mountain Path*, April 1982.

† This verse is the fifth of the seven verses which Sri Bhagavan selected from the *Arunachala Mahatmyam* and translated into Tamil.

(The Marital Garland of Letters) he sings, “O Arunachala, you root out the ego of those who think of you in the heart as ‘*Arunachala*’”. In the 102nd verse of *Aksharamanamalai*, he sings, “O Arunachala, the moment I thought of Arunai [the holy town of Arunachala] I was caught in the trap of your grace. Can the net of your grace ever fail?” And in the last line of the second verse of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai* (‘The Necklet of Nine Gems’) he sings, ‘*Mukti Ninaikka varul Arunachalam*’ meaning, ‘Arunachala, the mere thought of which bestows liberation’.

But only in the tenth verse of *Sri Arunachala Padikam* does Sri Bhagavan actually reveal how the thought of Arunachala works in the mind to root out the ego. In this verse he sings:

“I have seen a wonder, a magnetic hill that forcibly attracts the soul. Arresting the activities of the soul who thinks of it even once, drawing it to face itself, the One, making it thus motionless like itself, it feeds upon that sweet [pure and ripened] soul. What a wonder is this! O souls, be saved by thinking of this great Arunagiri, which shines in the mind as the destroyer of the soul [the ego]!”

The words ‘*oru tanadu abhimukhamaha irttu*,’ ‘drawing it to face itself, the One,’ used here by Sri Bhagavan are a mystic way of saying ‘drawing the soul to turn inwards and face Self, the one reality’. Thus in this verse Sri Bhagavan reveals how the thought of Arunachala works within the mind to arrest its activities, to attract its attention towards Self and thereby to make it still. In other words, Sri Bhagavan assures that the thought of Arunachala will lead the mind to the path of Self-enquiry, the ‘direct path for all’, as indeed happened in his own case. Knowing from personal experience this unique power of Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan confidently advises us in the last line of this verse, “O souls, be saved by thinking of this great Arunagiri, which shines in the mind as the destroyer of the soul!”

### The Form of Arunachala

Sri Bhagavan has said that Arunachala is the supreme Self that shines as ‘I’ in the Hearts of all living beings. In other words, Arunachala is truly the non-dual reality that transcends time, space, name and form. Hence, many of the verses in *The Five Hymns to Arunachala*, being very mystic in nature, can well be interpreted as applying to the nameless and formless Self, rather than to the name and form of Arunachala. For this reason, some devotees tend to view Sri Bhagavan’s revelation about the power of Arunachala as being purely allegorical, and a few even ask, “When Arunachala is the Self, why should we attach any particular importance to this hill.”\*

In order to understand more fully the importance that Sri Bhagavan attached to the name and form of this Hill, it is necessary for us to take a broad view of his teachings. In verse four of *Ulladu Narpadu* (‘The Forty Verses on Reality’) Sri Bhagavan says, “If oneself is a form, the world and God will also be likewise.” That is, they will also be forms. In the first line of the third verse of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam* he addresses Arunachala and sings, “When I approach you, regarding you as having form, you stand here as a Hill on earth.”

That is, so long as we identify the body as ‘I’, it is equally true that this Hill is God. Indeed, Sri Bhagavan used to say that because we identify the body as ‘I’, Lord Siva, the Supreme Reality, out of his immense compassion for us, identifies this Hill as ‘I’, so that we may see him, think of him and thereby receive his grace and guidance. “Only to reveal your [transcendent] state without speech [i.e. through

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\* In *Talks* No. 273 (p. 228) it is recorded that Dr. Syed once asked a similar question to Sri Bhagavan, who in reply pointed out that the Hill had attracted to Itself all the assembled devotees, including Sri Bhagavan Himself, and that *the power of the Hill therefore could not be denied*.

silence], you stand as a Hill shining from earth to sky,” sings Sri Bhagavan in the last line of the second verse of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*.

So long as we feel the name and form of our body to be ‘I’, we cannot conceive God as being anything but a name and form. Even if we think that God is formless, that very thought about God itself is a form – a mere mental conception. This is why Sri Bhagavan says in the second line of the third verse of *Ashtakam*, “If one tries to think of your nature as formless, he is like one who wanders throughout the world to see the sky.”\*

Being the perfect spiritual Master that he was, Sri Bhagavan knew well how important and necessary is the form of God for the human mind, which is ever attached to forms. And from his own personal experience he knew the unique power of the form of Arunachala, a power that cannot be found in such abundance in any other form of God, namely the power to turn the mind towards Self and thereby to root out the ego.

In verse eleven of *Sri Arunachala Padikam* Sri Bhagavan exclaims with joy and wonder, “Lo! How many are there like me who have been destroyed by thinking this hill to be the Supreme... ,” thereby assuring us that if we regard this hill as God, our egos will surely be destroyed. Though Arunachala appears outwardly as a hill of mere insentient rock, the true devotee understands it to be the all-knowing, all-loving and all-powerful Supreme Lord, who is guiding him both from within and without at every step and turn of life, leading him steadily and surely towards the goal of egolessness. “What a wonder! It stands as if an insentient hill [yet] its action is

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\* The futility of trying to conceive God as being formless when we are unable to know ourself as the formless Self, is well illustrated by a dialogue that Sri Bhagavan once had with some Muslims, which is recorded on p. 28 of *Maha Yoga* and in *Talks* No. 121.

mysterious – impossible for anyone to understand,” sings Sri Bhagavan in the first line of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*.

### The Name of Arunachala

Of all the names of God, the name dearest to the heart of Sri Bhagavan was Arunachala. Every one of the 108 verses of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* ends with the name Arunachala, and the refrain is ‘Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala!’ From the great love that Sri Bhagavan had for this name, it is clear that he regarded it as being no less powerful than the form of Arunachala. This fact is confirmed in verse seventy of *Aksharamanamalai* in which Sri Bhagavan sings, “O Arunachala, the very moment I thought of your name, you caught me and drew me to yourself. Who can understand your greatness?”

There are many incidents in the life of Sri Bhagavan that illustrate his great love for the divine name Arunachala, but perhaps the most striking occurred during his last moments. About twenty-five minutes before he left his body, the assembled devotees began to chant *Aksharamanamalai*. Hearing the name of his beloved Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan opened his eyes, which shone with love, and tears of ecstasy rolled down his cheeks.

Though Sri Bhagavan never gave *mantra-diksha* nor formally accepted anyone as his disciple, many devotees believe that Arunachala is the *nama-mantra* that he has bestowed upon the whole world. When a Guru formally gives a mantra to his disciple, he explains to him the meaning and significance of each letter of the mantra and tells him the fruit to be gained by meditating upon that mantra. In the same manner, in the second verse of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai* Sri Bhagavan has explained the meaning of each syllable in the name Arunachala and he has declared that mere thought of this name will bestow liberation. From this we can infer that Arunachala is the *jnana-panchakshari*, the five-syllable mantra that bestows *jnana*. Moreover, tradition

tells us that when a mantra is given by a *jnani* and when he explains the significance of each syllable of that mantra, he is actually putting his own power into that mantra. Therefore, if any devotees of Sri Bhagavan wish to have a mantra, they can very well take Arunachala to be the mantra openly given to them by him.

The power of the name Arunachala was once directly confirmed by Sri Bhagavan. In 1948 a certain devotee came to him from Bombay, and with him he brought a notebook in which he had written the name ‘Arunachala Siva’ many thousands of times. On the last page of this notebook the devotee wrote a prayer to the following effect, “O Bhagavan, in the life of Sarada Devi [the wife of Sri Ramakrishna] it is written that she has said that if even an animal dies in Kasi it will attain liberation. Therefore, graciously bestow upon be the boon of death in Kasi,” and gave the notebook to Sri Bhagavan.

Bhagavan looked through the notebook and when he came to the last page he read out loud the devotee’s prayer: at once he expressed the greatest surprise and exclaimed, ‘*Smaranat Arunachalam!*’

The words ‘*Smaranat Arunachalam*’ mean ‘by remembering Arunachala’, and they occur in the very same Sanskrit verse that says that by dying in Kasi one will attain liberation. Bhagavan then turned to the revolving bookcase by his side and took out a book, probably the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*. Opening it as if at random, he read out a sentence in Tamil that said, “One ‘Arunachala’ is equal in power to one crore ‘Om Nama Sivaya’.” (‘Om Nama Sivaya’ is believed by Saivas all over India to be the most sacred and powerful mantra). After reading out a few other portions of this book that emphasized the unique greatness and power of Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan finally laid it aside and explained to the devotee that, not everyone can see Chidambaram, not everyone can be born in Tiruvarur, and not everyone can die in Kasi, but anyone, and everyone, can think of Arunachala

from wherever they may be, and thereby they will surely attain liberation.

From this incident we can understand how unhesitatingly Sri Bhagavan encouraged devotees to have absolute faith in Arunachala. If devotees of a sceptical frame of mind came to him and asked him how mere thought of Arunachala could bestow liberation, he used to explain the allegorical significance of this saying, since that alone would satisfy their mind. But if devotees came to him with simple, child-like faith, he would strengthen their faith and confirm the literal meaning of this saying, since he knew from personal experience the great power of the name and form of Arunachala.

### **The Unique Sanctity of Arunachala**

In India there are countless holy places (*kshetras*) that are sacred to Lord Siva or to some other name and form of God, and many of them are more well-known and popular than Arunachala. Yet there is a verse in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*, which has been selected and translated into Tamil by Sri Bhagavan, that says:

Arunachala is truly the holy place. Of all holy places it is the most sacred! Know that it is the heart of the world. It is truly Siva himself! It is his heart-abode, a secret *kshetra*. In that place the Lord ever abides as the Hill of light named Arunachala.

Whenever Sri Bhagavan asked about the special sanctity of Arunachala, he used to explain that other holy places such as Kailas, Kasi and Chidambaram are sacred because they are the abodes of Lord Siva whereas Arunachala is Lord Siva himself. However, as the above verse of *Arunachala Mahatmyam* says, Arunachala is a secret *kshetra*. Because it is this place that bestows *jnana* and because most people have so many other desires and do not truly want *jnana*, Arunachala has always remained comparatively little known.

But to those few who seek *jnana*, Arunachala always makes itself known through some means or other.

The unique sanctity and power of *Arunachala-kshetra* was once confirmed by an incident that happened in the life of Sri Bhagavan. Because of his great love for Sri Bhagavan, a certain devotee wanted to take him to his native place, Chidambaram. But rather than directly ask Sri Bhagavan to come to Chidambaram, he began to ask him if he had ever been to see Lord Nataraja in Chidambaram Temple. When Sri Bhagavan replied that he had not, the devotee began to describe the greatness of Chidambaram, saying that it was the most sacred *Siva-kshetra* in South India, that so many saints and sages had lived there and had sung in praise of Lord Nataraja, and so on and so forth. Sri Bhagavan listened to all he said with patient interest, but showed no signs of wanting to visit Chidambaram. Seeing this, the devotee at last said, “Chidambaram is even greater than Arunachala, because among the *panchabhuta*-lingams [the lingams representing the five elements] Chidambaram is the space-lingam while Arunachala is only the fire-lingam.\* Since the four elements, earth, water, air and fire, finally have to merge in space, space is the principal element.”

Hearing this, Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, “All the five elements come into existence only when Sakti seemingly forsakes her identify with Lord Siva, the Supreme Self (*Paramatman*). Since the five elements are thus only the creations of Sakti, she is superior to all of them. Therefore, more important than the place where the elements merge, is the place where Sakti herself merges. Because Sakti is dancing in Chidambaram, Lord Siva has to dance before her and thereby make her become motionless. But in Arunachala

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\* Though Arunachala is generally considered to be one of the *panchabhuta*-lingams, Sri Bhagavan used to point out that It is truly not a lingam of ordinary fire, which is one among the five gross elements, but is a lingam of the Fire of knowledge (*jnagni*), the Fire that burns the ego to destruction.)



Lord Siva remains ever motionless (*achala*), and hence Sakti automatically and effortlessly merges in him through great love. Therefore, Arunachala shines as the foremost and most powerful *kshetra*, because here Sakti, who has seemingly created all this manifold appearance, herself merges into the Lord. So for those mature aspirants who seek to put an end to the false appearance of duality, the most powerful help is to be found only in *Arunachala-kshetra*.”

Subsequently, on 24th June 1928, Sri Bhagavan summarised this reply of his in the form of a verse, which later became the first verse of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai*. In this verse he says:

Though he is truly motionless by nature, in the court [of Chidambaram] Lord Siva dances before Sakti, thereby making her motionless. But know that [in Tiruvannamalai] Lord Arunachala shines triumphant, that Sakti having merged in his motionless form.

### **The Gurutvam of Arunachala**

Arunachala has always been renowned as the bestower of liberation, the destroyer of the ego, the remover of the false notion ‘I am the body’ – as the *jnana-Guru* par excellence.

When Brahma and Vishnu began to quarrel, being deluded by pride and egoism, Lord Arunachala Siva appeared before them in the form of a column of fire, thereby vanquishing their egoism and teaching them true knowledge. When Sakti, Goddess Parvati, wished to attain a state in which she could do no wrong, Lord Siva sent her to Arunachala, where she merged and became one with him. Thus, even to Brahma and Vishnu, Arunachala was Guru, and to Parvati it was the place where she lost her separate individuality.

Throughout the ages saints and sages have sung verses in Sanskrit, Tamil and other Indian languages extolling the unique power of Arunachala to root out the ego and to bestow Self-knowledge. All the four great Saiva sages of Tamil Nadu, Manickavachakar, Sundaramurti, Appar and

Jnanasambandhar, have sung in praise of Arunachala. In one verse often pointed out by Sri Bhagavan, Jnanasambandhar described this hill as being *jnana-tiral*, a dense mass of *jnana*. And Sundaramurti, singing in Tiruvanaikka, remembers Arunachala and sings, “O Annamalai, you can be known only to those who give up the attachment to the body”.

These *puranic* stories and songs of ancient sages all confirm the fact that Arunachala is the supreme *jnana-Guru*. But this fact has received its most striking confirmation from Sri Bhagavan. In verse nineteen of *Aksharamanamalai* he explicitly states that Arunachala shines as the form of his Guru; and in the same verse he reveals the function of the real Guru, namely to destroy all our defects, including the root-defect, the ego, to bestow all good qualities upon us and to rule over us.

In many of his other verses Sri Bhagavan has clearly indicated that the role of Arunachala is the role of the *Sadguru*. For example, in *Aksharamanamalai* he sings that Arunachala roots out the ego of those who think of it (verse 1), that it annihilates those who approach it as God (verse 48) and that it destroys the attachment of those who come to it with attachment (verse 77). He also reveals that Arunachala instructs through silence (verse 36), and that it teaches the path of self-enquiry (verse 44); and he shows us the way of praying to Arunachala to bestow *jnana* (verse 40), to reveal Self as the reality (verse 43), and to make us give up the attachment to the body (verse 75). He has also confirmed, from his own experience, the power of Arunachala as Guru. In verse eight of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai* he sings that, in order to put an end to his sufferings in the world, Arunachala ‘gave me his own state’. In verse nine he describes the wonder of Arunachala’s grace saying, “You entered my mind, drew me and established me in your own state.”

All that Sri Bhagavan has said about the power of Arunachala tallies exactly with what he has said about the power of the Guru. In verse 268 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (The

Garland of Guru's Sayings) he says that the Guru is he who possesses the supreme power to make any soul who comes to him merge into Self, the knowledge beyond all speech. The Guru works in many ways to make the disciple merge into Self. "He gives a push from 'without' and exerts a pull from 'within', so that you may be fixed in the Centre," says Sri Bhagavan in *Maharshi's Gospel*, p. 36. From 'without' the Guru gives verbal instructions to turn the disciple's mind towards Self, and he also enables the disciple to have association (satsang) with his form, and thereby to gain the necessary strength and love to turn within and attend to Self. To give verbal instructions it is necessary for the Guru to be in human form, but to give satsang and subtle inner guidance he may be in any form.

Sri Bhagavan has come as the Guru in human form to give us all the necessary verbal instructions, and he has revealed that Arunachala is the Guru in the form of a Hill with which we can always have satsang. Like any human body, the human form of the Guru will inevitably pass away one day, whereas the form of Arunachala will always remain. Thus, though Sri Bhagavan has left his human form, he has provided us with all the requisite outward help: he has left us with a permanent record of his verbal teachings, and he has shown us a form with which we can always have satsang. Therefore, for the devotees of Sri Bhagavan there will never be any need to search for another outer Guru, because all the necessary help and guidance is ever available for us in the form of the teachings of Sri Bhagavan and the satsang of Arunachala.

The power of the satsang of Arunachala was often confirmed by Sri Bhagavan. Dr. T.N. Krishnaswamy records in the *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir*, p. 7 that Sri Bhagavan once said to him:

"The whole Hill is sacred. It is Siva himself. Just as we identify ourselves with a body, so Siva has chosen to identify himself with this Hill. Arunachala is pure wisdom (*jnana*) in

the form of a Hill. It is out of compassion to those who seek him that he has chosen to reveal himself in the form of a Hill visible to the eye. *The seeker will obtain guidance and solace by staying near this Hill.*”

### **Arunachala-pradakshina**

Arunachala is the physical embodiment of Sat, the reality, and hence to have contact with it in any manner is satsang. To think of Arunachala is satsang, to see Arunachala is satsang, and to live near Arunachala is satsang. But one very special way of having satsang with Arunachala is to do *Arunagiri-pradakshina*, that is to walk barefoot round the hill keeping it to one’s right side.

The great importance that Sri Bhagavan attached to *giri-pradakshina* is well known to all the devotees who lived with him. He himself did *pradakshina* countless times, and he actively and spontaneously encouraged devotees to follow his example.

“Bhagavan, who scarcely ever gave advice to devotees unless asked, wholeheartedly encouraged their going round the hill as conducive to progress in sadhana,” writes Lucia Osborne in *The Mountain Path*, January 1974, p. 3.

Devaraja Mudaliar records that the importance of *pradakshina* became evident to him “from the frequent references by Bhagavan himself to its great significance, and from the fact that thousands of people do it, including almost all the close disciples of Bhagavan, even those who may be considered the most advanced among them.” (*My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 64)

Though comparatively little has been recorded of what Sri Bhagavan used to say about the power of *pradakshina*, there is no doubt that he considered it to be an act having great spiritual efficacy. In fact, he used to say that the benefits which can be gained by meditation and various other forms of mind-control only after great struggle and effort, will be effortlessly gained by those who go round the hill.

“Bhagavan often said that those unable to meditate would succeed in their endeavour by circumambulating Arunachala,” writes Suri Nagamma in *My Life at Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 144.

Kunju Swami records on p. 108 of *Enadu Ninaivugal* that Bhagavan once told him, “What is better than *pradakshina*? That alone is sufficient.”

While extolling the spiritual efficacy of *pradakshina*, Sri Bhagavan sometimes used to narrate the story of King Vajrangada Pandya, which is told in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*. Vajrangada Pandya was a powerful monarch who ruled over most of South India, but one day he was told by some celestial beings that in his previous birth he had been Indra, the ruler of heaven, and that if he worshipped Arunachala he could regain his former position. On hearing this, he at once renounced his kingdom and, with the intense desire to become Indra, he began to worship Arunachala by going around the hill three times a day. After three years of such worship, Lord Siva appeared before him and offered him any boon he wished to pray for. Though his original ambition had been to become Indra, his mind had been matured by doing so many *pradakshinas*, he now realised that it was worthless to pray for such a transitory pleasure. He therefore prayed to Lord Siva for the eternal happiness of Self-knowledge. This story thus aptly illustrates that even if a person begins to do *pradakshina* for the fulfillment of worldly desires, his mind will in time be matured and he will gain proper discrimination (*viveka*), desirelessness (*vairagya*) and love for Self (*swatma-bhakti*).

Generally, whenever sages or scriptures prescribe any form of dualistic worship, whether for the fulfillment of worldly desires or for the attainment of Self-knowledge, they always say that it must be done with faith. But Sri Bhagavan used to say that the power of Arunachala is such that even if one does *pradakshina* with no faith, it will still have its effect and will surely purify the mind. Devaraja Mudaliar records

on p. 64 of My Recollections that Sri Bhagavan told him, “For everybody it is good to make circuit of the hill. It does not even matter whether one has faith in this *pradakshina* or not; just as fire will burn all who touch it whether they believe in it or not, so the hill will do good to all those who go round it.”

Because Arunachala is the ‘fire of knowledge’ (*jnanagni*) in the form of a hill, the outgoing tendencies (*vasanas*) of the mind are automatically scorched when one goes round it. When damp wood is brought close to a fire, it will gradually be dried, and at a certain point it will itself catch fire. Similarly, when the mind which is soaked with worldly tendencies goes round the hill, the tendencies will gradually dry up and at a certain point the mind will become fit to be burnt by the fire of *jnana*. That is why Sri Bhagavan said to Kunju Swami, “This Hill is the storehouse of all spiritual power. Going round It benefits you in all ways”. (*The Mountain Path*, April 1979, p. 75)

The spiritual benefits of *pradakshina* have been described by Sri Sadhu Om in one of his Tamil poems, *Sri Arunachala Pradakshina Manbu*. In verses six and seven he says, “A cow grazing round and round its peg, does not know that the length of its rope is thereby decreasing. Similarly, when you go round and round Arunachala, how can your mind know that it is thereby subsiding? When the cow goes round more and more, at one point it will be bound tightly to its peg. Similarly, when the mind lovingly goes more and more round Annamalai [Arunachala], which is Self, it will finally stand still in Self-abidance, having lost all its movements [*vruttis*].”

In verse eight he says, “It is a well-proven truth that the minds of those devotees who ever go round Annamalai achieve great love to turn within towards Self. Annamalai is the blazing, wild Hill of fire [the fire of *Jnana*] that burns all our worldly desires into ashes.” And in verse nine he gives the simile of a piece of iron being rubbed against a magnet; just as the scattered atoms of iron are all aligned by the magnet to

face in one uniform direction, thereby transforming the iron into a magnet, so, when a person goes round Arunachala, the divine magnet, his scattered mind, is turned towards Self and is thereby transformed into Self.

Sri Muruganar, who was a great sage and one of the foremost disciples of Sri Bhagavan, was noted as a staunch lover of *pradakshina*. In the days of Sri Bhagavan he used to write to any friends who were coming to see him, “You will find me either in Bhagavan’s hall or on the *giripradakshina* road,” and it is said that at one time he even used to go round the hill daily. How he first came to know about the greatness of *giripradakshina* is related by Kunju Swami in *The Mountain Path*, April 1979, p. 83, as follows:

“Sometime after he came here, Sri Muruganar asked Bhagavan about the spiritual benefit of going round the hill (*giripradakshina*). Bhagavan asked him to go round it first and then come to him. Sri Muruganar followed his advice and told Bhagavan that he lost his *dehatma buddhi* [sense of identification with the body] after a while and regained it only after reaching Adi Annamalai [a village on the way]. He reported to Sri Bhagavan that the experience was unexpected and unique. Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, ‘Do you now understand?’”

This incident proves very clearly the power of *pradakshina*, and it shows that mature souls can even lose their sense of identification with the body by going round the hill. It also illustrates what Sri Bhagavan meant when he used to say that while going round the hill one can experience *sanchara-samadhi*, a thought-free state of bliss while walking.

Though such a thought-free state is not experienced by all devotees when they go round the Hill, that does not mean that their *pradakshina* is not yielding fruit. The main benefit of *pradakshina* is that the tendencies (*vasanas*) are slowly made to lose their grip over the mind, but just as a child cannot easily perceive its own growth, so the mind cannot easily perceive the weakening of its own *vasanas*.

However, one very notable feature about *pradakshina* that can be perceived by anyone and which clearly indicates its spiritual efficacy is the extraordinary power of attraction it exerts over the minds of devotees. For no special reason one feels attracted to go round Arunachala again and again.

“Go round the hill once. You will see that it will attract you,” said Sri Bhagavan to Devaraja Mudaliar (*My Recollections*, p.65).

“Bhagavan used to say that if one went round the hill once or twice, the hill itself would draw one to go round it again. I have found it true. Now this is happening to Dr. Syed,” writes Devaraja Mudaliar in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 19th December, 1945.

In *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, volume 2, letter 98, Suri Nagamma records Sri Bhagavan as saying, “The dhyana [meditation] that you cannot get into while sitting, you get into automatically if you go for *pradakshina*. The place and atmosphere here are like that. However unable a person is to walk, if he once goes round the hill he will feel like going again and again. The more you go, the more the enthusiasm for it. It never decreases. Once a person is accustomed to the happiness of *pradakshina*, he can never give it up.”

Just as the mind is automatically attracted to the Guru, knowing intuitively that he can bestow eternal bliss, for the same reason, the mind feels automatically attracted to *giripradakshina*.

### **Arunachala-Ramana**

To understand the power of Arunachala, it is first necessary to understand the relationship that existed between Arunachala and Bhagavan. To Bhagavan, Arunachala was Mother, Father, Guru and God – it was his all in all, his own Self.

Sri Bhagavan often said, “God, Guru and Self are one and the same”, and to him Arunachala was all three of these. In verse forty-eight of *Aksharamanamalai* he refers to



Arunachala as his God, in verse nineteen as his Guru, and in verse five of *Atma Vidya Kirtanam* (The Song on the Science of Self) as “Annamalai, my Self”.

Truly, Arunachala is Ramana and Ramana is Arunachala. The two are inseparable. Arunachala is Ramana in the form of a Hill, and Ramana is Arunachala in human form. The oneness that Sri Bhagavan felt with Arunachala is disclosed in many of his verses.

When a devotee enquired about his true nature, he replied, “Arunachala-Ramana is the Supreme Self who blissfully abides as consciousness in the Heart-cave of all souls beginning with Hari (Lord Vishnu). . . .”

The same name, ‘Arunachala-Ramana’, which he used while referring to himself, he also uses while addressing the hill in the last verse of *Aksharamanamalai*, and in verse ninety he calls the hill ‘Ramana’. When Sri Bhagavan composed *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam* (The Five Gems) in Sanskrit, a devotee composed a concluding verse in which he said that these five verses were an Upanishad revealed by Srimad Ramana Maharshi. Later, when Sri Bhagavan translated this hymn into Tamil, he adapted this concluding verse and substituted the name ‘Arunagiri-Ramana’ for the name ‘Srimad Ramana Maharshi’, thereby indicating that it was Arunagiri (Arunachala) itself in the form of Ramana who sang this hymn. From all this, it is clear that Sri Bhagavan experienced no individuality or existence of his own separate from Arunachala.

Though Bhagavan Ramana has left his human form, he will always remain shining here in the form of Arunachala, giving guidance and solace to his devotees. Therefore, the power of Arunachala is the power of Ramana – the power of the *Sadguru’s* grace.

O Arunachala, Ocean of Grace in the form of a Hill,  
bestow Grace upon me!

– *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*, verse 17.

## 57. Kannapa Nayanar narrated by Bhagavan

In the biography of Bhagavan we read: “Towards the end of 1895 (perhaps a few months after hearing about Arunachalam from a relation) he found at home a copy of the *Periya Puranam* which his uncle had borrowed. This was the first religious book that he went through apart from his class lessons and it interested him greatly.... It transported him to a different world.... As he read on, surprise, admiration, awe, reverence, sympathy and emulation swept over his soul in succession... but when the book had been quickly read through and laid aside, the new impulses and ideals disappeared leaving him as he was before that study.”

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The *Periya Puranam* is the song describing the lives of sixty-three Saivite saints of the ancient Tamil land. Sekkizhar named it Tiruthondar Puraanam (Legend of the Holy Servitors). He narrates very briefly the lives of the servitors of Siva. Thus one has Sundaramurthy Naayanaar Puraanam, Kannappa Naayanaar Puraanam, Tirumula Naayanaar Puraanam and so on.

The grace of Siva is very potent when received through his servitors (*Nayanmars*). The *Periya Puranam* is therefore ‘big’ in the sense of being very important as it deals with the lives of such servitors.

Sundarar, one of the Trinity, had himself composed a short poem on the Lives which is called *Tiruthondattogai*.

Sekkizhar, a contemporary of the Chozha king Anapaya, had composed the *Periya Puranam*, basing it on the two earlier works. He visited the

various holy places associated with the saints and gathered many details and legends. He was thus able to compose a considerably larger poem on the Lives than did his predecessors. He was however able to derive poetic inspiration only after Lord Siva gave him the lead with the word ‘Ulagelaam...’ (All of Creation).

We give below some of the stories of the saints of *Periya Puranam* as narrated by Sri Ramana Maharshi. These stories inspire devotion to Lord Siva in those who read and follow them.

**I**n the book “At the feet of Bhagavan”, T.K. Sundaresa Iyer recounts how Bhagavan narrated the story of a *nayanmar* as follows: “Once someone placed the *Periya Puranam* in Tamil prose in Bhagavan’s hands, and He began reading out of it. Now Bhagavan was a past master in story-telling, and he used to tell stories in hundreds. His solo-acting was ever the admiration of His devotees; His modulation of voice for different characters, suiting gestures and postures for each incident, was wonderfully effective. His devotees never missed a chance of being in the Hall on such occasions, so as to enjoy and benefit by the recitals.

Bhagavan began to read out the life of Kannappar, the great devotee saint. He went on reading incidents in his early life, and how he went to the forest and found Kudumi Devar, the Sivalinga, his Lord, up the Kalahasti Hill in the Chittoor district (of Andhra state). Then he told how Kannappar worshipped the Sivalinga with water carried in his own mouth, flowers taken from his own hair, and the well-cooked and tasted beef prepared for his own meal – knowing no better and having nothing better to offer his beloved Lord. The way in which the ordained priest, Siva Gochariar, resented the intruding defiler of the sacred Sivalinga was so characteristically brought out by Bhagavan, with His own explanations of the rites and the meanings of the mantras

used in the worship, that it enriched the recital greatly to the benefit and admiration of the devotees.

Then came the scene of scenes, when the Lord in that Sivalinga tested Kannappar and incidentally revealed to Siva Gochariar the intensity of the forest hunter's worship from a place of hiding. He saw the unexpected trickling of blood from one of the eyes on that Sivalinga; he saw Kannappar running to and fro for herbs, and treating the Lord's eye with them. Then he saw how, finding them all useless, Kannappar plucked out one of his own eyes and applied it to that in the Sivalinga; then, seeing the treatment was effective, he ran into ecstasies of joyful dance.

When Bhagavan came to the story of how Kannappar was plucking out his second eye to heal the second of the Lord, and of how the Sivalinga extended a hand to stop him, saying "Stop, Kannappar!" Bhagavan's voice choked, His body perspired profusely, His hairs stood on end, tears gushed out from His eyes; He could hardly utter a word, and there was silence, pin-drop silence in the Hall. All were dumbfounded that this great *Jnani* could be so overpowered by emotion and ecstasy at the great hunter-saint's devotion. After a while Sri Bhagavan quietly closed the book, dried the tears in His eyes with the ends of His towel, and laid aside the book, saying, "No, I can't go on any further."

In the '*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*', Suri Nagamma writes about Bhagavan's narration of the lives of the great saints of Saivism. Bhagavan narrated the story in Tamil which was written down in Telugu by Nagamma and later translated into English. The stories as recorded by in the "Letters" are given below:

## 58. Dravida Sishu\*

Yesterday Bhagavan said that Sankara sang about Sambandha in ‘Soundarya Lahari’ referring to him as ‘dravida sishu’, didn’t he? Last night I took out ‘Soundarya Lahari’ with a Telugu commentary and saw the sloka written by Sankara about Sambandha which is as follows:

**tavastanyaṁ manye dharanīdharakanye hṛdayataḥ  
payah pārāvāraḥ parivahati sārāsvatāmiva|  
dayāvatyā dattaṁ draṇḍaśīśurāsvādyā tavaya-  
takavīnām prauḍhānāmajani kamanīyaḥ kavayitā|| 75||**

“O Daughter of the Mountain, I fancy that the ocean of the milk of poesy rising out of Thy heart verily caused the milk of Thy breasts to flow. On swallowing this milk given by Thy grace, the Dravidian child became a poet among great poets.”

The Telugu commentary stated that the word ‘dravida sishu’ in the sloka meant Sankara himself. I mentioned this to Bhagavan next day. Bhagavan replied, “the Telugu commentators must have stated it wrongly. The Tamil ‘Soundarya Lahari’ stated that the words ‘dravida sishu’ meant Sambandha and not Sankara” and he sent for the Tamil book and read out all that was written in it about the reason for Sambandha receiving the title of ‘dravida sishu’, and explained it to us as follows:

“Sambandha was born in an orthodox Brahmin family in the town of Sirkazhi, to Sivapada Hridayar and his wife Bhagawatiyar. The parents named him Aludaya Pillayar. One day, when the boy was three years old, the father took him to Tiruttoni Appar Koil. While immersed in the tank for a bath, he began repeating the *aghamarshana mantram*. When the child could not see the father in the tank, it looked around with fear and grief. There was no trace of the father.

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\* Suri Nagamma, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 1st February 1947.

It could not contain its grief and so wept aloud looking at the temple chariot saying, ‘Father! Mother!’ Parvati and Lord Siva appeared in the sky, seated on the sacred Bull and gave darshan to that little child. Siva directed Parvati to give the boy a golden cupful of her breast milk, the milk containing Siva *Jnana* (Knowledge of Siva). She did accordingly. The boy drank the milk and became free from sorrow, and the divine couple disappeared.

“Having drunk the milk of *Jnana*, and feeling quite satisfied and happy, Sambandha sat on the tank bund with milk dribbling from the corners of his mouth. When the father came out from his bath, he saw the boy’s condition and angrily asked, flourishing a cane, ‘Who gave you milk? Can you drink milk given by strangers? Tell me who that person is or I will beat you.’ Sambandha immediately replied by singing ten Tamil verses beginning with: *tōḍudaiya ceviyan viḍaiyēri ōr tūveṇ madisūdi. . .*’ “The gist of the first verse is: ‘The Man with *Kundalas* (sacred ear-rings), the Man who rides the sacred Bull, the Man who has the white moon on his head, the Man whose body is smeared with the ashes of the burning ghat, the thief who has stolen my heart, he who came to bless Brahma, the Creator, when Brahma, with the Vedas in his hand, did penance and he who occupies the sacred seat of Brahmapuri, he, my Father, is there, and she, my Mother who gave the milk, is there!” So saying he described the forms of Siva and Parvati as he witnessed with his eyes and who gave him milk to drink, and also pointed towards the temple chariot.

“It was clear from the verses, that the people who gave milk to the child were no other than Parvati and Lord Siva. People gathered round. From that day onwards, the boy’s poetic flow began to run unimpeded. That is why Sankara sang, *Thava Stanyam Manye*. The commentators therefore decided that the word ‘dravida sishu’ referred to Sambandha alone. Nayana also wrote of him as ‘dravida sishu’ in *Sri Ramana Gita*.”

## 59. Jnana Sambandhamurthy

After Bhagavan had read out from the Tamil commentary of Soundarya Lahari and told us that the words *dravida sishu* referred to Sambandha himself, the discussion on that subject continued in the Hall for the subsequent 2 or 3 days. In this connection a devotee asked Bhagavan one day, “Sambandha’s original name was Aludaya Pillayar wasn’t it? When did he get the other name ‘Jnana Sambandhamurthy?’ and why?” Bhagavan replied, “As soon as he drank the milk given by the Goddess, Jnana Sambandha (contact with Knowledge), was established for him, and he got the name Jnana Sambandhamurthy Nayanar. That means, he became a *Jnani* without the usual relationship of Guru and disciple. Hence, people all over the neighbourhood began to call him by that name from that day onwards. That is the reason.”

I said, “Bhagavan too acquired knowledge, without the aid of a Guru in human form?” “Yes! yes! That is why Krishnayya brought out so many points of similarities between Sambandha and myself,” said Bhagavan.

“In *Sri Ramana Leela* it is stated, that while Sambandha was coming to Tiruvannamalai the forest tribes robbed him of his possessions. He was a man of wisdom and knowledge. What property had he?” I asked. “Oh! that! He followed the path of devotion, didn’t he? Therefore, he had golden bells and a pearl palanquin and other symbols of that nature according to the injunctions of Iswara. He had also a *Mutt* (an establishment) and all that a *Mutt* requires,” said Bhagavan. “Is that so? When did he get all those?” I asked.

Bhagavan replied with a voice full of emotion, “From the time when he acquired the name of Jnana Sambandha, that is, even from his childhood, he used to sing with uninterrupted poetic flow and go on pilgrimage. He first visited a holy place called *Tirukolakka*, went into the temple there, sang verses in praise of the Lord, beating time with his little hands. God

appreciated it and gave him a pair of golden bells for beating time. From that day onwards the golden bells were in his hands whatever he sang and wherever he went. Thereafter he visited Chidambaram and other holy places and then went to a pilgrim centre called Maranpadi. There were no trains in those days. The presiding deity in that place observed this little boy visiting holy places on foot. So His heart melted with pity, and He created a pearl palanquin, a pearl umbrella and other accompaniments bedecked with pearls suitable for sanyasis, left them in the temple, appeared to the Brahmin priests there and to Sambandha in their dreams and told the Brahmins, ‘Give them to Sambandha with proper honours,’ and told Sambandha, ‘The Brahmins will give you all these: take them.’ As they were gifts from Gods he could not refuse them. So Sambandha accepted with reverential salutations by doing *pradakshina* etc., and then got into the palanquin. From that time onwards, he used to go about in that palanquin wherever he went. Gradually some staff gathered around him and a *Mutt* was established. But whenever he approached a holy place, he used to alight from the palanquin as soon as he saw the gopura (tower) of the shrine and from there onwards, he travelled on foot until he entered the place. He came here on foot from Tirukoilur as the peak of Arunagiri is visible from there.”

A Tamil devotee said that this visit was not clearly mentioned in *Peirya Puranam* to which Bhagavan replied as follows:

“No. It is not in *Periya Puranam*. But it is stated in Upamanyu’s *Sivabhaktavilasam* in Sanskrit. Sambandha worshipped Virateswara in Arakandanallur and won the God’s favour with his verses and then he worshipped Athulyanatheswara in the same way. From there he beheld the peak of Arunagiri and sang verses out of excess of joy and installed an image of Arunachaleswara in the same spot. While he was seated there on a *mantapam*, God Arunachaleswara appeared to him first in the shape of a Jyoti (light) and then in



the shape of an old Brahmin. Sambandha did not know who that old Brahmin was. The Brahmin had in his hand a flower basket. Unaccountably, Sambandha's mind was attracted towards that Brahmin like a magnet. He at once asked him with folded hands, 'Where do you come from?' 'I have just come from Arunachalam. My village is here, nearby,' replied the Brahmin. Sambandha asked him in surprise, 'Arunachala! But how long ago did you come here?' The Brahmin replied indifferently 'How long ago? Daily I come here in the morning to gather flowers to make a garland for Lord Arunachala and return there by the afternoon.' Sambandha was surprised and said, 'Is that so? But they said it is very far from here?' The old Brahmin said, 'Who told you so? You can reach there in one stride. What is there great in it?' Having heard that, Sambandha became anxious to visit Arunachala and asked, 'If so, can I walk there?' The old man replied, 'Ah! If an aged man like myself goes there and comes here daily, can't a youth like you do it? What are you saying?'

"With great eagerness Sambandha asked, 'Sir, if that is so, please take me also along with you,' and started at once with all his entourage. The Brahmin was going in advance and the party was following behind. Suddenly the Brahmin disappeared. As the party was looking here and there, in confusion, a group of hunters surrounded them, and robbed them of the palanquin, umbrella, golden bells and all the pearls and other valuable articles, their provisions and even the clothes they were wearing. They were left with only their loin-clothes. They did not know the way; it was very hot and there was no shelter, and all were hungry as it was time for taking food. What could they do? Then Sambandha prayed to God. 'Oh! Lord, why am I being tested like this? I don't care what happens to me, but why should these followers of mine be put to this hard test?' On hearing those prayers, God appeared in his real form and said, 'My son, these hunters too are my Pramatha Ganas (personal attendants). They deprived you of all your possessions as it is best to proceed to the

worship of Lord Arunachala without any show or pomp. All your belongings will be restored to you as soon as you reach there. It is noon time now. You may enjoy the feast and then proceed further.’ So saying he disappeared.

“At once, a big tent appeared on a level space nearby. Some Brahmins came out of the tent and invited Sambandha and his party to their tent, entertained them to a feast with delicious dishes of various kinds and with *chandanam* (sandal paste) and *thambulam* (betel leaves). Sambandha who was all along entertaining others, was himself entertained by the Lord Himself. After they had rested for a while, one of the Brahmins in the tent got up and said, ‘Sir, shall we proceed to Arunagiri?’ Sambandha was extremely happy and accompanied the Brahmin along with his followers. But as soon as they set out on their journey, the tent together with the people in it disappeared. While Sambandha was feeling astonished at those strange happenings, the guide who had been leading them to Arunachala disappeared as soon as they arrived there. Suddenly, the tent along with the people in it and the hunters who had robbed them previously appeared from all sides and restored to Sambandha all his belongings which they had robbed previously, and vanished. With tears of joy, Sambandha praised the Lord for His great kindness, stayed there for some days, worshipped Him with flowers of verses and then proceeded on his journey. Out of His affection for Sambandha, who was serving Him with reverence, God Himself, it would appear, invited him to this Hill.”

So saying, Bhagavan assumed silence, with his heart filled with devotion and with his voice trembling with emotion.

## 60. Saint Appar

**A**ppar was born as Marul Neekkiyar in a village called Tiruvamur in the Thirumunaipadi region of a Vellala family of Saivaites. His father's name was Pugazhanar and mother's name was Madiniyar. He had only one sister by name Tilakavati. As he grew up he became proficient in all studies. When Tilakavati was 12 years of age, the parents decided to give her in marriage to a commander in the king's army. Just then there was a war and that commander went away saying he would marry her on his return. In the meantime, Pugazhanar passed away and his wife Madiniyar committed Sati. The brother and sister were left alone. They awaited the return of the commander, but after some time they heard that the commander had died in the war. Tilakavati wanted to commit Sati as her parents had decided to give her away in marriage to that commander and she felt that her body was therefore his. Marul Neekkiyar with great grief, fell at the feet of his sister and told her that he looked up to her as his father and mother, and if she insisted on dying on the funeral pyre, he would also commit suicide. As she was anxious that her brother should live and prosper, she gave up her idea of committing Sati. She however did not marry but remained at home absorbed in the service of the Siva temple and in her own Tapas (austerity).

Marul Neekkiyar realised that material wealth was transitory. Whatever money, gold and other valuables he had, he gave away, became a sanniyasi, left home and in his wanderings reached Patalipuram (Tiruppadiripuliyur, i.e. Cuddalore). There the most important place at that time was the Samana *Mutt*. As fate would have it, he went there and joined the Samana cult (a Jain cult), was given the title of Dharmasena, and became the Head of the *Mutt*, the *Purohit* of the Rajah and the Poet Laureate of the kingdom. He therefore stayed on there.

Tilakavati, who was staying at her native place, heard this news and felt sad. She went to their family deity, Veerattaneswara, on the banks of the river Gedilam and prayed to God several times to save her brother from following the ways of the heretics. One day Parameswara appeared to her in a dream and said. “O Tapaswini you can now give up your mental agony. In his last birth, your brother was a sannyasi, but did not perform tapas properly. There was a flaw in his tapas. As a result of that, he has now joined that heretic (Pashanda) cult. I shall now save him by making him suffer from stomachache. Give up your grief and relax.”

Immediately thereafter, Dharmasena had a violent stomach ache. Several people in that *Mutt* who were well versed in Mantras and Tantras tried best to cure him but could not succeed and so gave up all hopes. Dharmasena could not bear the agony any longer. He then remembered his sister. Hoping she might be of some help, he sent a man to fetch her. She refused to give up her own Dharma and go to the Samana *Mutt*. On hearing that, Dharmasena regretted his having given up his own Dharma, namely Saivism, and without the knowledge of other people in the *Mutt*, left the *Mutt* at night, with two servants for his native place. When he tapped at the door and called his sister, she recognised his voice and opened the door. He fell at her feet and requested her to forgive him. She received him with open arms and overjoyed at the kindness of Parameswara, and after giving him holy ash, taught her brother the Panchakshari Mantra. He smeared the holy ash all over his body and repeated the Mantra.

Tilakavati took her brother to the temple of Veerattaneswara. When he prostrated and got up, Marulneekkiyar began composing songs in Tamil in praise of Siva. The first of the Ten Verses (Padigam) begins with ‘Kootrayinavaru’. His stomach ache ceased immediately. That is why there is a belief that whoever recites these songs gets relief from all illness.

After that, he took up *Sannyasa* and went on a pilgrimage singing his Padigams (containing 10 verses each). In due course he reached Chidambaram. After worshipping Nataraja there, and singing, he went with his followers to nearby Sirkazhi. He had heard that Sambandhar had become a saint by drinking the milk of the mother of the universe, Parvati, when he was a little child. Hearing that he was coming, Sambandhar with his followers went out to meet him. As soon as they met, Marul Neekkiyar fell at the feet of Sambandhar. The latter lifted him up with his hands with great affection, and as a show of respect, called him 'Appah'. Appar immediately claimed that he was the Dasan (servant) of Sambandhar. From that time onwards, Marul Neekkiyar came to be known as Appar. Subsequently both of them went together to the temple of Brahmapureeswara. Sambandhar then asked Appar to worship the Lord, which Appar did with his Padigams. After that, they went together to several temples and sang Padigams in praise of the Lord. You have already heard of Vedaranyam and the sovereigns. There are several other stories like that. After his contact with Appar, Sambandhar went to Patalipuram, defeated the people of Samana *Mutt* by arguments and established Saivism. They always used to be together.

## **61. Sambandhar and Appar**

**W**hile on a pilgrimage, the twelve-year old Sambandhar and Appar reached Vedaranyam. The main gate of the Vedaranya temple was found locked. It seems that long ago the ancient Vedas took human shapes. They worshipped the Lord in the temple with sprinkling or pouring of water (abhisheka) and puja, and leaving, closed the main gate and sealed it. Since then no one had the courage to open it and so a hole was bored through the wall and a side gate improvised

for people for coming and going out. When Appar and Sambandhar enquired about the closure of the main gate, the watchman told them this story and suggested that they could go in by the side gate. They did not feel like using that gate and so decided to pray to Iswara for the opening of the main gate. Sambandhar suggested that Appar should pray. It was then that Appar sang a hymn of ten verses. Iswara is fond of Appar's songs and it seems He was so absorbed in hearing them, that He forgot to open the gate. When the gate did not open even on singing the ninth verse, Appar was overwhelmed with grief and sang the tenth verse saying: "Oh Lord, has not your heart melted yet?" When even that had no effect, he sang a eleventh verse beginning: "Avakkanai Vavalaladar Thittaneer", the purport of which is: "When Ravana lifted Mt. Kailasa with his hands you struck him down with your little finger and inflicted trouble on him for a thousand years. That being so, how will you have compassion for me?" When this was sung, it seems that Iswara regretted the delay and immediately opened the doors.

After entering the temple and worshipping the Lord therein, they came out. Appar requested Sambandhar to pray to Iswara to close the door and when Sambandhar sang only one verse, the doors closed with a bang. On this occasion, Iswara tested Appar by not answering his prayers until he sang eleven songs and favoured Sambandhar by promptly closing the doors when he sang only one song.

On another occasion, it was Sambandhar that was put to a severe test while Appar was readily granted favour. From the time Iswara put him to a severe test at Vedaranyam. Appar felt aggrieved and began worshipping Iswara with greater devotion than ever. Subsequently both Appar and Sambandhar went on a pilgrimage with their respective retinues and reached a village called Tiruveezhimizhalai. At that time the village was in the grip of a famine. Unable to bear the sight of the sufferings of the people they decided to stay in two different Mutts along with their attendants and distribute food

to the people. They had of course no money with them and so went to the local temple to pray to Iswara. Pleased with their devotion, Iswara gave them a sovereign each and every day. The sovereign used to be kept on the doorstep. The one given to Appar was accepted by the vendors of foodstuffs and the required articles were readily supplied. Food could therefore be given to the people before the afternoon set in. The sovereign of Sambandhar was however below the standard purity of gold and so the dealers offered to take it only at a discount. The attendants had therefore to come back to the *Mutt* to obtain Sambandhar's consent, then return to the shop, buy the required articles and then feed the people rather late, by about 2 p.m. every day.

In due course this delay came to the notice of Sambandhar. On enquiry he found that it was all due to the bad coins he was getting from the Lord daily. He went to the temple and sang ten songs beginning with "Vasiteerave Kasunalguveer", which means: "Swami, why are you giving me coins which are not pure gold?" Then the Lord who is the embodiment of kindness, said: "Appar is worshipping me with his mind, speech and deed, while you are doing it with your mind and speech only". Appar was daily cleaning the temple grounds, making them neat and tidy. "It was only to point out the difference that I have been doing like this. Henceforth, I shall give you also good coins. Don't worry". And from that day onwards good coins were given.

## 62. Siva Bhakta Sundaramurthy\*

Yesterday Bhagavan while going through *Tiruchuzhi Puranam*, spoke thus regarding the events connected with the visit of Sundaramurthy to this holy place:

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\* *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 26th January 1947.

“The venerable Sundaramurthy, born in the *amsa* of Aalaala Sundara, who emanated from the reflection of Lord Siva the Somasekhara (with moon in his crown), acquired the friendship of the Kerala king, Cheraman Perumal Nainar, in the course of his wanderings as a pilgrim. Then they both went to Madurai on a pilgrimage. The Pandyan king as well as his son-in-law, the Chola king, extended a very warm welcome to them and expressed their happiness at being their hosts. Sundaramurthy worshipped God Sundaeswara the husband of the goddess Meenakshi and sang the praise of the god with his poetic skill. Accompanied by the Chera king he visited and worshipped at the sacred shrines of the south, namely Tirukuttralam, Tirunelveli, and Rameswaram. From there he visited the sacred shrine of Tirukkedeswara in Lanka Dwipa (Ceylon) and offered worship. There he remembered Trisulapuram (Tiruchuzhi) which is the Muktinagar (city of salvation) and proceeded thither. As they approached that city, the crowds saw them both resplendent as though the sun and the moon appeared at the same time. Sundaramurthy was happy to have the darshan of Lord Bhuminatha and offered worship with the song beginning ‘Unaye Uyir Pugalai’ and was overwhelmed with devotion. He decided to stay in that holy place for a while, and so resided in a *Mutt* on the bank of the river Koundinya.

“One night during his stay there, Lord Siva appeared to him in a dream with a ball in his hand (ball is the symbol of kingship) and a crown on his head, as a youth of incomparable beauty and with a smile dancing on his lips, and said, ‘We stay in Jyotivana (Kaleswara)’. On hearing these words, Sundaramurthy woke up with excitement, and recollected the glorious kindness of the Lord who appeared and showered benevolence on him, and narrated the wonderful vision to the Chera king with joy. There and then he sang, overwhelmed with devotion, the Tevara Padigam commencing with the words, ‘Tondar Adithodalalum’ on Lord Kaleswar.



From there they started to visit the far off holy place, Tiruppunavayil, and even as they started, God Kaleswara, who had appeared in the dream of Sundaramurthy, and Amba approached them in the guise of an old Brahmin couple. When Sundaramurthy asked them, ‘Who are you? Where do you come from?’ they replied, ‘We shall talk about that later. First give us food. We are hungry.’ Sundaramurthy consented and got food prepared and looked for the couple to serve it to, but they were not to be seen anywhere. All the lanes and by-lanes of the village were searched but they could not be found anywhere. They came back to the *Mutt* only to find that the food that was cooked had all disappeared and the leaves in which the food was eaten were thrown all over the yard. Sundaramurthy was wonderstruck and exclaimed, ‘Ah! What a wonder is this! What can this be except the Leela (game) of the Lord of the Universe?’ As he arrived at this conclusion, he heard an invisible voice: ‘Where do you intend going without seeing us that reside in the Jyotivana?’ Sundaramurthy was wondering where that Jyotivana was and how to go there, when the invisible voice once again said, ‘We are proceeding there on the vehicle of the sacred bull Nandi. You may also come there, following its footsteps.’

“Sundaramurthy followed the footsteps accompanied by the devotees there; but suddenly the track disappeared. As he stood there in confusion, the invisible voice was heard to say, ‘Look carefully.’ As he followed carefully the footsteps he saw a particular place full of Siva Lingas. There was no space even for a single step forward and he and the other devotees stood there in confusion. Suddenly he saw a narrow footpath and they went along it, on and on until at last they beheld the temple of Kaleswara. They all took their bath in the tank in front of the temple and, as they were thinking of going into it, all on a sudden, the temple with its tower disappeared. Sundaramurthy was wonderstruck and sang some songs in praise of the Lord, conveying the idea ‘Is this the result of my not having come for worship in your temple before bathing?’

At once, a whole view of Jyoti (light) appeared and the peak view of a temple tower and then the temple itself with its compound wall. He was overjoyed, had a darshan of God, worshipped him and sang songs in praise of him, and then proceeded on his pilgrimage. This is a wonderful story. There are many more stories of him,” said Bhagavan.

He is the same Sundaramurthy that was referred to in my letter printed earlier under the heading, “Swami is everywhere,” (No. 70, Part I). His story is given in detail in the Sanskrit works “Siva Bhaktha Vilasam”, “Upamanya Bhaktha Vilasam” and in the Telugu works, “Panditharadhya Charitra” and “Basava Puranam” of the poet Palakurthi Somanatha.

Bhagavan told us once before that the devotion of Sundaramurthy to the Lord is that of a friend, of Manickavachakar that of the beloved, of Appar that of a servant, and Sambandhar that of a son.

### 63. Sundaramurthy’s Bond of Servitude\*

Yesterday, after hearing Bhagavan’s narration of Sundaramurthy’s story, which I have mentioned in my letter to you, I was desirous of hearing the story of that devotee’s younger days and so went to Bhagavan’s presence early this morning at 7.30 a.m. Bhagavan had already returned from the hill and was reading some book. There were not many people in the hall at that time. Having made my obeisance, I asked Bhagavan what the book was that he was reading. He replied, “*Periya Puranam*. I am just going through the story of the younger days of Sundaramurthy.” “It is all very interesting, isn’t it?” I asked. “Yes. Would you like to read it?” asked Bhagavan. “I should very much like to but I do not know Tamil sufficiently well,” I replied. “All right.

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\* *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 27th January 1947.

I will tell you the story briefly,” said Bhagavan and, with a smile, proceeded with the story as follows:

“Sundaramurthy was born in the sacred place Tirunavanur in Tirumunaippadi country in the Siva Brahmana caste called Adi Saivam, to the Siva priest called Chadayanar alias Sivacharya and his wife Isaijnaniyar. He was named by his parents Nambiyarur. One day, while he was playing in the street with a toy cart, the king of the place, by name Narasinga Muniyar, saw him and took a fancy to him. He requested the father, Sivacharya, to let him have the boy. The father agreed and the boy was brought up by the king as his foster son. Even so, the Brahminical usages as regards thread ceremony and vedic instructions were carefully observed and he became well-versed in all the Sastras.

“When he came of age, his marriage with the daughter of a relative by name Chatangavi Sivacharya was decided upon, and invitations were issued to all relatives for the function. Sundaramurthy went through the usual premarital ceremonies a day before the marriage, and on the marriage day proceeded properly dressed as the bridegroom along with his relatives, to the bride’s father’s house in Puttur village on horseback quite early in the morning. On reaching the bride’s house, he alighted from the horse and sat on the wedding seat in the marriage pandal in accordance with the usual custom. There was a blare of music and the arrival of the bride was awaited.

“Just then, Lord Siva approached the marriage pandal in the garb of an old Brahmin, and announced, ‘All of you please listen to what I say.’ On their assenting, the old man told the boy, ‘Look here, there is an agreement between you and me. First fulfil it and then marry.’ The boy replied, ‘If there is an agreement let it be so but tell us first what it is.’ The old Brahmin told the audience, ‘Sirs, this boy is my servant. I have with me the deed of service executed by his grandfather in my favour’ Sundaramurthy replied, ‘Oh! Madman, enough! We are hearing for the first time that a Brahmin is the servant of another Brahmin. Go, get away!’ The Brahmin replied, ‘I

am neither a madman nor a devil. I am not offended at your remarks. You have not understood me at all. Stop this childish talk and come and serve me.’ Sundaramurthy then said, ‘Show me the deed.’ ‘Who are you to decide after seeing the deed?’ said the old man. ‘If the people in the audience see the deed and agree that it is true, you should begin to serve me.’ Sundaramurthy got very angry and pounced upon the man to snatch the deed from him. The Brahmin however ran away but the boy pursued him, snatched the deed at last, and tore it to pieces. The old man caught hold of Sundaramurthy and began shouting. The marriage guests got agitated over that, separated the two and said to the Brahmin, ‘You are speaking of arrangements unheard of in this world. Oh! Quarrelsome old man! Where do you come from?’ The Brahmin replied, ‘I belong to the village of Tiruvonnainallur. Don’t you agree that this boy Nambiyarurar has confirmed his servitude to me by unjustly snatching away the service deed from my hands and tearing it to pieces?’ Sundaramurthy replied, ‘If indeed you are a resident of Tiruvonnainallur village, your claim can be decided there, can’t it?’ The Brahmin replied, ‘Yes. Come with me. I shall produce the original deed before the Council of Brahmins there and establish my claim that you are my servant.’ Accordingly, the Brahmin walked ahead and Sundaramurthy and all the other Brahmins followed him.

“As soon as they all reached the Council of Brahmins in the other village, the cunning old Brahmin filed his claim petition before them to the effect that the boy Nambiyarurar tore up the service deed in his favour. The councillors said, ‘We have not heard anywhere in this world that Brahmins become servants of Brahmins.’ The Brahmin replied, ‘No. Mine is not a false claim. The deed that this boy tore up is the deed of service executed by his grandfather to the effect that he and all his successors are to be my servants.’ The councillors asked Sundaramurthy, ‘Can you win your case by merely tearing up the deed executed by your grandfather? What do you say?’ He replied, ‘Oh virtuous men, learned in

all the vedic lore! You all know that I am an Adi Saiva. Even if this old Brahmin is able to establish that I am his servant, you must please consider it a piece of magic, beyond the reach of mental reasoning. What can I say of such a claim?’ The councillors told the Brahmin, ‘You must first prove to us that he is your servant. To decide an affair of this nature, three things are needed, custom, written evidence and oral evidence. Should you not produce at least one of these three items?’ The Brahmin replied, ‘Sir! what he tore up is only the duplicate copy; the original deed is with me.’ The councillors demanded the production of the original deed, and gave him an assurance that it would not be torn up by Sundaramurthy. The old man took out the original deed from the folds of the cloth around his waist, and showed it to them. The village Karnam who happened to come there unexpectedly then, was asked to read it. He bowed before the councillors, opened the folds of the original document and so as to be heard by all, he read it out aloud as follows: ‘I, Adi Saiva by caste and Arurar by name, residing in Thirvennainallur village have executed this deed of service gladly and out of my own free will, undertaking to do service by me and by my successive descendants, to pitthan (madman) residing in Tiruvennainallur village, (Sd.) Arurar.

“The witnesses to the deed were those very councillors, and they all identified and confirmed that the signatures were their own. The councillors asked Sundaramurthy to verify if the handwriting in the deed was his grandfather’s. The man pretending to be a Brahmin said, ‘Sir! This is a mere boy. How can he identify his grandfather’s writing? If there is any other paper available, containing his grandfather’s writing, please send for it, and compare.’ They all agreed, and the relatives of Sundaramurthy searched, and produced a paper containing his grandfather’s handwriting. The councillors compared the two papers, and confirmed that the writings in the two papers agreed. They told Sundaramurthy ‘Boy! There is no way of escape for you. You have lost. It is your duty to do service

according to this old man's orders.' Sundaramurthy was stupefied at this and said that he would obey the order, if fate had decreed that way. They had compassion on the boy, and had still some doubts about the Brahmin, and questioned him, 'Sir! This deed says that you belong to this very village. Can you show us where your ancestral house and property are?' The Brahmin pretended surprise, and said, 'What! You are all of this village, so learned, so intelligent, so elderly – does not even one among you know my house? How surprising are your words! Come with me then!' So saying, he led the way, and they all followed. They all saw the God in disguise enter the Siva's temple called 'Tiruvarul Turai' in the village, and were stupefied.

"Sundaramurthy thought: 'The Brahmin who made me his servant has entered the temple of my God Parameswara! What a wonder!' So thinking, he followed alone eagerly, the footsteps of the Brahmin and entered the temple with great desire and shouted, 'Oh Brahmin!' At once Lord Siva appeared in the company of Goddess Parvati, seated on the sacred Bull, and said, 'My son' You are Aalaala Sundara, one of my Pramatha Ganas (chief attendants). You were born here as a result of a curse. You requested me to have you as My own, wherever you might be, even during the period of the curse. I therefore made you my servant here."

Thus Bhagavan narrated to us the earlier story of Sundaramurthy. He continued:

"As soon as Sundaramurthy heard those words of the Great Lord, he was overjoyed like the calf that hears the mother's call. With his voice trembling with emotion and eyes filled with tears of joy, he made prostrations to Him, and with folded hands said 'Oh Lord! You are gracious to my worthless self, hold me fast to you like the cat holding on to its kitten, and make me your own. What gracious kindness!' and praised Him. The Great Lord was pleased and said, 'My son! Because you have disputed with me, you shall have the name of '*Vanthondan*'. The service to be rendered hereafter

by you to me, is to worship me with flowers of verses. Compose verses on me, and sing them.’ With folded hands, Sundaramurthy said, ‘Oh Lord! You came in the guise of a Brahmin, and preferred a claim against me, and I contested and argued with you, not knowing your greatness. You are the great Lord that gave me recollection of my past, and saved me from falling into worldly actions and behaviour and getting drowned therein. What do I know of your limitless great qualities, and what shall I sing of them?’ Iswara said, ‘You already called me *Pitthan*, madman. Therefore, sing of me as the Madman’. So saying, he disappeared. Sundaramurthy immediately sang the Sri Padigam, commencing with the verse ‘*Pittha pirai sudi*’. His story is full of such strange experiences,” said Bhagavan.

I asked, “Is he named Sundaramurthy as the result of the recollection of his past?” “Yes, yes! No other reason is to be found in his story!” replied Bhagavan.

## 64. Manickavachakar

From the time Bhagavan told me about the probable reason for the establishment of Manickavachakar’s *Mutt* in Adi Annamalai I have been keen to hear the story of his birth and achievements. When an opportunity came I asked: “It is stated that while Manickavachakar was singing the *Tiruvachakam*, Natarajamurthy wrote it down. Is it true? Where was he born?” BHAGAVAN: “Yes. It is true. That story will be found in *Halasya Mahatmyam*. Don’t you know?”

NAGAMMA: “There is no copy of *Halasya Mahatmyam* in Telugu here. So I do not know.”

BHAGAVAN: “I see. If that is so, I shall tell you the story in brief.” So saying Bhagavan narrated the following story: “Manickavachakar was born in a village called Vadavur (Vatapuri) in Pandya Desha. Because of that people used to

call him Vadavurar. He was put to school very early. He read all religious books, absorbed the lessons therein, and became noted for his devotion to Siva, as also his kindness to living beings. Having heard about him, the Pandya King sent for him, made him his Prime Minister and conferred on him the title of ‘Thennavan Brahmarayan’, i.e., Premier among brahmins in the south. Though he performed the duties of a minister with tact and integrity, he had no desire for material happiness. His mind was always absorbed in spiritual matters. Feeling convinced that for the attainment of *jnana*, the grace of a Guru was essential, he kept on making enquiries about it.

“Once the Pandya King ordered the minister to purchase some good horses and bring them to him. As he was already in search of a Guru, Manickavachakar felt that it was a good opportunity and started with his retinue carrying with him the required amount of gold. As his mind was intensely seeking a Guru, he visited all the temples on the way. While doing so he reached a village called Tiruperundurai. Having realised the maturity of the mind of Manickavachakar, Parameswara assumed the form of a school teacher and for about a year before that had been teaching poor children in the village seated on a street pial, near the temple. He was taking his meal in the house of his pupils every day by turn. He ate only cooked green vegetables. He was anxiously awaiting the arrival of Manickavachakar. By the time Manickavachakar actually came, Iswara assumed the shape of a *Siddha Purusha* (realised soul) with many sannyasis around him and was seated under a Kurundai (yellow amaranth) tree within the compound of the temple. Vadavurar came to the temple, had darshan of the Lord in it, and while going round the temple by way of *pradakshina*, saw the *Siddha Purusha*. He was thrilled at the sight, tears welled up in his eyes and his heart jumped with joy. Spontaneously, his hands went up to his head in salutation and he fell down at the feet of the Guru like an uprooted tree. Then he got up, and prayed that he, a humble being, may also be accepted as a disciple. Having



come down solely to bestow grace on him, Iswara, by his mere look, immediately gave him *Jnana Upadesa* (initiation into knowledge). That *upadesa* took deep root in his heart, and gave him indescribable happiness. With folded hands and with joyful tears, he went round the Guru by way of *pradakshina*, offered salutations, stripped himself of all his official dress and ornaments, placed them near the Guru and stood before him with only a *koupinam* on. As he felt like singing in praise of the Guru he sang some devotional songs, which were like gems. Iswara was pleased, and addressing him as Manickavachakar, ordered him to remain there itself worshipping Him. Then He vanished.

“Fully convinced that He who had blessed him was no other than Iswara Himself, Manickavachakar was stricken with unbearable grief and fell on the ground weeping and saying, “Oh! my lord, why did you go away leaving me here?” The villagers were very much surprised at this and began a search for the person who was till then working in their village as a school teacher but could not find him anywhere. Then they realised that it was the Lord’s leela. Sometime later, Manickavachakar got over his grief, decided to act according to the injunctions of Iswara, sent away his retinue to Madurai, spent all the gold with him on the temple and stayed there alone.

Hearing all that had happened, the king immediately sent an order to Manickavachakar to return to Madurai. But then how could he go to the king without the horses? If he wanted to purchase them then, where was the money? Not knowing what to do, he prayed to Lord Siva for help. That night Lord Siva appeared to him in a dream, gave him a priceless gem and said, “Give this to the king and tell him the horses will come on the day of the *Moola* star in the month of *Sravana*.” Startled at that vision he opened his eyes, but the Lord was not there. Manickavachakar was however overjoyed at what had happened, put on his official dress and went to Madurai. He gave the gem to the king, discussed

the auspicious time when the horses would be arriving and then was anxiously waiting for the day. He did not however resume his official duties. Though his body was in Madurai, his mind was in Tiruperundurai. He was merely biding time. The Pandyan King, however, sent his spies to Perundurai and found out that there were no horses there meant for the king and that all the money meant for their purchase had been spent in the renovation of the temple. So he immediately put Manickavachakar in prison making him undergo all the trials and tribulations of jail life. “Meanwhile, as originally arranged, on the day of the *Moola* star, Iswara assumed the guise of a horseman, transformed the jackals of the jungle into horses, and brought them to the king. The king was astonished at this, took delivery of the horses and according to the advice of the keeper of the stables, had them tied up at the same place where all his other horses were kept. He thanked the horseman profusely, and after sending him away with several presents, released Manickavachakar from jail with profuse apologies. The same night, the new horses changed into their real forms, killed all the horses in the stables, ate them, created similar havoc in the city and fled. The king grew very angry, branded Manickavachakar as a trickster and put him back into jail. Soon in accordance with Iswara’s orders, the waters of the river Vaigai rose in floods and the whole of the city of Madurai was under water. Alarmed at that, the king assembled all the people and ordered them to raise up the bunds of the river. For the purpose, he ordered that every citizen should do a certain amount of work with a threat of dire consequences should he fail to do his allotted work.

“There was in Madurai an old woman by name ‘Pittuvani Ammaiya’. She was a pious devotee of Lord Siva. She was living alone earning her livelihood by daily preparing and selling ‘pittu’ (pittu is sweetened powdered rice pressed into conical shapes). She had no one to do her allotted work on the river bund nor had she the money to hire a person to do it. She was therefore greatly worried and cried, ‘Iswara! What

shall I do?’ Seeing her helplessness, Iswara came there in the guise of a coolie with a spade on his shoulder and called out, ‘Granny, granny, do you want a coolie?’ ‘Yes’, she said, ‘but I do not have even a paisa in my hand to pay you. What to do?’ He said, ‘I do not want any money and would be satisfied if you give me some portion of pittu to eat. I shall then do the allotted work on the river bund.’

“Pleased with that offer, she began making pittu but they did not come out in full shape but were broken. Surprised at this she gave all the bits to the coolie. He ate as many of them as he could and went away saying that he would attend to the bund-raising work. Surprisingly, the dough with the old woman remained intact even though she had prepared and given bits of the pittu to the coolie. The coolie went to the work spot, but instead of doing the work lay down there idly standing in the way of others doing their work.

“The king went round to inspect the progress of the work and found that the portion allotted to Ammaiyaar remained unattended to. On enquiry, his servants told him all about the pranks of that coolie. The king got infuriated, called the coolie and said, ‘Instead of doing the allotted work, you are lying down and singing.’ So saying he hit the coolie on the back with a cane he had in his hand. The hit recoiled not only on the king himself but on all living beings there and all of them suffered the pain on that account. The king immediately realised that the person hit by him was Parameswara himself in the guise of a coolie. The king stood aghast. Parameswara vanished and soon a voice from the sky said, ‘Oh king! Manickavachakar is my beloved devotee. I myself did all this to show you his greatness. Seek his protection’. Soon after hearing that voice, the king went to see Manickavachakar, and on the way he stepped into the house of Pittuvani to see her. By that time, she had already got into a vimanam (a heavenly car moving through the skies) and was on her way to Kailasa. The king was greatly surprised and saluted her and from there he went straight to Manickavachakar and fell at his feet.

Manickavachakar lifted him with great respect, and enquired of his welfare. The king entreatingly said, ‘Please forgive me and rule this kingdom yourself.’ Manickavachakar, looking at the king, said with kindness, ‘Appah! (a term of endearment) As I have already agreed to serve the Lord, I cannot be bothered with the problems of ruling a kingdom. Please do not mistake me. Rule the kingdom yourself looking after the welfare of the people. Henceforth you will have nothing to worry about.’ So saying, smilingly, he put on the dress of a sannyasin, went about visiting holy places singing the praise of Siva. There are several stories like this.”

NAGAMMA: “When was the *Tiruvachakam* written?”

BHAGAVAN: “No. He never wrote. He merely went about singing his songs.”

NAGAMMA: “Then how did *Tiruvachakam* get to be written?”

BHAGAVAN: Oh that! He was going from one place to another until he came to Chidambaram. While witnessing Nataraja’s dance he started singing heart-melting songs and stayed in that place itself. Then one day Nataraja, with a view to making people know the greatness of Manickavachakar and to bless those people with such an excellent collection of hymns, went to the house of Manickavachakar in the night, in the guise of a brahmin. He was received cordially and when asked for the purpose of the visit, the Lord smilingly and with great familiarity asked, ‘It seems you have been singing Hymns during your visit to the sacred places of pilgrimage and that you are doing it here also. May I hear them? I have been thinking of coming and listening to you for a very long time but could not find the required leisure. That is why I have come here at night. I suppose you don’t mind. Can you sing? Do you remember them all?’ ‘There is no need to worry about sleep. I shall sing all the songs I remember. Please listen’. So saying Manickavachakar began singing in ecstasy. The Lord in the guise of a brahmin, sat down there writing the songs on palm leaves. As Manickavachakar was in

ecstasy he hardly noticed the brahmin who was taking down the songs. Singing on and on, he completely forgot himself in the thought of God and ultimately became silent. The old brahmin quietly disappeared. “At daybreak, the *dikshitar* (priest) came to the Nataraja Temple as usual to perform the morning puja and as he opened the doors he found in front of the Nataraja idol a palm-leaf book on the doorstep. When the book was opened and scrutinised there were in it not only the words ‘Tiruvachakam’, it was also written that the book was written as it was dictated by Manickavachakar. It was signed below ‘Tiruchitrambalam’, i.e., Chidambaram. The stamp of Sri Nataraja also was there below the signature. Thereupon, all the temple priests gathered in great surprise and sent word to Manickavachakar, showed him the *Tiruvachakam*, and the signature of Nataraja and asked him to tell them about the genesis of the hymns.

“Manickavachakar did not say anything but asked them to accompany him, went to the temple of Nataraja and standing opposite to the Lord said, ‘Sirs, the Lord in front of us is the only answer to your question. He is the answer.’ After having said that, he merged into the Lord.” As he narrated the story, Bhagavan’s voice got choked. Unable to speak any more he remained in ecstatic silence.

## 65. Sri Muruganar

**S**ri Muruganar was one of those devotees who received in full measure the Grace of Sri Bhagavan and who thereby attained the supreme experience, Brahmanubhava. Countless verses in his great work *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham* give clear expression to his rich and perfect experience of Sri Bhagavan’s Grace and leave the reader convinced that he was not only an inspired poet of unsurpassed excellence but also an *Atma-Jnani*. On understanding the meaning of these

verses one is filled with the greatest hope and encouragement as Sri Muruganar never tires of affirming again and again the greatness and power of our *Sadguru*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana. Indeed, he repeatedly asserts that all that he attained was a pure gift of Sri Bhagavan's Grace and that he himself never did anything. In one verse, for example, he says that without ever making him close his eyes or do any meditation, Sri Bhagavan made him realise the Truth.

It was Sri Muruganar's overwhelming love for Sri Bhagavan that made him a fit vessel for His Grace. In *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* he has sung nearly two thousand heart melting verses in praise of Sri Bhagavan and praying for His Grace to root out the ego. From the day he came to Sri Bhagavan, his love for Him was wholehearted and one pointed, and never again did he turn towards any other God or Guru, nor did he care for any other thing in this world. He once told Sri Sadhu Om: "I had not only heard of Sri Bhagavan before coming to Him, I had also read some of His works. Therefore, I had already decided that he alone should be my Guru. I was simply sitting in His presence. I did not see any vision or such things at that time, nor did I like to have any such experience. I was confident that even the mere Presence of this great *Sadguru* would do everything for me. Sri Muruganar continued: "Be not disheartened. No mediator is necessary for us in order to obtain the light of his Grace. It is certain that Sri Bhagavan, the Ocean of Grace, of his own accord and without the intercession or interference of anyone else, directly contacts the heart of each one who comes to him."

It was always the nature of Sri Muruganar to rely upon no one and nothing except Sri Bhagavan. In 1926 he left home and came to settle permanently at the Feet of Sri Bhagavan, and with him he brought all his worldly wealth and possessions, which he gave to the Ashram as his *Guru-dakshina*. For a while he lived in the Ashram, but being a free bird by nature he did not like to depend upon anyone or to

be bound by anything, so after six months he found it more congenial to stay outside the Ashram and to beg his food along the streets of Tiruvannamalai. Thus, for many years he lived a free and independent life, sitting at the Feet of Sri Bhagavan and drinking the nectar of His Grace.

However, because of the jealousy of a few of his contemporaries, Sri Muruganar had to undergo many troubles. And though most of these troubles were known to Sri Bhagavan, He generally did not interfere in any way but allowed things to take their own course. Nevertheless, there were some occasions when Sri Bhagavan showed that He was by no means indifferent to Sri Muruganar, and the following is an example of one such occasion:

Once when some jealous devotees were talking amongst themselves in a very mean and belittling way about Sri Muruganar, Sri Bhagavan happened to overhear them. “Yes, yes, they may belittle Muruganar as much as they like. But when *Sannidhi Murai* and *Guru Vachaka Kovai* came out, his position among the very foremost devotees became firmly established. Whatever they now say about him, they cannot shake him down”, remarked Sri Bhagavan.

From this remark we can understand how much love and regard Sri Bhagavan had for Sri Muruganar. Though Sri Bhagavan generally spoke kindly of everyone, it was very rarely that He ever used superlatives in this manner. And when He thus spoke of Sri Muruganar as one among “the very foremost devotees” it was far from being an ordinary compliment, for it ranked him on a par with such eminent devotees as Manickavachakar and other great saints of yore.

Moreover, in the path of Sri Ramana love and knowledge, bhakti, and *jnana*, are inseparable; hence, being a great devotee, Sri Muruganar was ipso facto a great disciple also. Indeed, he may very well be regarded as the most eminent disciple of Sri Bhagavan, for it was through him that many of the principal works of Sri Bhagavan came into existence. Within five years of his coming to Sri Bhagavan he had become instrumental

in bringing into existence *Atma Vidya Kirtanam*, *Upadesa Undiyar* and *Ulladu Narpadu*, and during the twenty-eight years of his association with Him he collected and recorded most of His important *upadesas* in the form of more than one thousand two hundred Tamil verses, which now make up the priceless work *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (*The Garland of Guru's Sayings*). The indispensable role that he played in the genesis of *Ulladu Narpadu* – namely, his collecting the stray verses of Sri Bhagavan, selecting the essential ones, arranging them in a coherent order and requesting Sri Bhagavan to compose the links necessary to form a complete though terse revelation of the truth – itself proves what a profound insight he had into the heart of Sri Bhagavan's teachings.

Though Sri Muruganar thus played such an important role in making the pure teachings of Sri Bhagavan available to the world, for many years his true greatness remained known to only a very few of the more discerning devotees of Sri Bhagavan – so self-effacing and unobtrusive was he. But real greatness cannot remain hidden forever. The pre-eminence of Sri Muruganar is nowadays becoming known to an ever wider public and devotees are able to appreciate now more than ever before that he was indeed a perfect disciple of Sri Bhagavan. Hence it may be worthy in this context to relate one more incident which illustrates what great esteem Sri Bhagavan had for Sri Muruganar. Though Sri Muruganar renounced his family and all worldly ties in 1926 and came and settled permanently at the feet of Sri Bhagavan, for many years he did not bear the outward signs of renunciation. He continued to have long hair, to wear a sacred thread and to observe some useful *acharas* (orthodox practices). His was primarily an inward renunciation, for he knew well that outward signs are immaterial to true renunciation. Indeed, according to Sri Bhagavan, the outward signs of renunciation such as a shaven head and *kashaya* cloth come according to *prarabdha*, and hence they can neither help nor hinder true, inner renunciation. One morning, however, sometime in the year 1947, when Sri Muruganar entered the



Hall as usual and prostrated himself before Sri Bhagavan, his long hair was not to be seen. His head was clean-shaven, and his sacred thread had also vanished.

Peering down at the prostrate figure lying before Him, Sri Bhagavan smilingly remarked, “Oho, even that has gone!” What is to be inferred from these gracious words of Sri Bhagavan? Do they not mean that Sri Muruganar’s inner attachments and tendencies (*vasanas*) had already been renounced, and that now even his long hair and outward *acharas* had gone? From this remark of Sri Bhagavan and from His remark about Sri Muruganar being one among “the very foremost devotees”, is it not clear that Sri Bhagavan recognized and openly approved the supreme devotion and the complete renunciation of Sri Muruganar? And since supreme devotion and complete renunciation are both but other names for true knowledge, can we not infer from these remarks of Sri Bhagavan that Sri Muruganar had indeed realised the Truth? However, what gives Sri Muruganar his unique position among the devotees of Sri Bhagavan is not only his Self-realisation, for countless must be the devotees who have realised the Truth through the Grace of Sri Bhagavan. “Because the ever-unborn (self) has taken birth (in the form of Sri Ramana), many of the ever-undying (egos) have died”, sings Sri Muruganar in one verse of *Sri Ramana Anubhuti*. Indeed, when Sri Bhagavan gave Liberation even to Cow Lakshmi, how can we doubt that He would also have given Liberation to many human beings? However, most of those who thus attained Liberation by the Grace of Sri Bhagavan will remain ever unknown to the world, for the death of the ego is an inward change and can seldom be noticed outwardly. To explain this point, Sri Bhagavan sometimes used a simile given in the scriptures, namely that of the *vilampazham*, a hard-shelled, wood-apple fruit which is swallowed by an elephant. When the fruit comes out in the elephant’s dung it is seemingly unchanged. Its shell remains unbroken, and not even a crack can be seen from outside. However, if one

breaks the shell one will find it to be empty, all its contents having been digested by the elephant.

Similarly, though the ego of a ripe soul will be completely destroyed by the *Sadguru* when he comes and sits for even a few moments in His presence, he will nevertheless go away as if unchanged and will never show any outward mark to indicate to others what a tremendous change has taken place within. In this way many devotees would have realised the Truth in the Presence of Sri Bhagavan without ever being noticed by others.

Therefore, it is not only the fact that Sri Muruganar realised the Truth that gives him his unique place among the foremost disciples of Sri Bhagavan. What makes him infinitely important to us, the devotees of Sri Bhagavan, and what makes us revere him so highly is the fact that we too can derive actual benefit from him and from his Realisation. Though many devotees have realised the Truth through the Grace of Sri Bhagavan, only a few rare souls like Sri Muruganar have been chosen by Him as instruments for the bestowal of His Grace on others.

The Grace of the *Sadguru* functions in ever so many ways. It functions through His Silence, it functions through His having assumed a human name and form which we can adore and glorify, it functions through the example of His life, it functions through His teachings, and it also functions through His devotees. The *Sadguru* uses the mind, speech and body of His egoless devotees as the pure instruments of His Grace. At the instance of such devotees He bestows His true teachings upon the world, through them He afterwards expounds and makes clear those teachings, through them He reveals the greatness and power of His Grace, and through them He sets a pure example of devotion and self-effacing conduct which can be seen and followed by less mature devotees. In all these ways, Sri Bhagavan's Grace has functioned through Sri Muruganar. At the instance of Sri Muruganar Sri Bhagavan bestowed upon the world such

precious works as *Upadesa Undiyar*, *Ulladu Narpadu* and *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, which enable us nowadays to know the true teachings of Sri Bhagavan in their authentic, unalloyed and undiluted form. Through Sri Muruganar Sri Bhagavan has given us a rich, profound and authoritative commentary upon *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*, the moving hymn through which He teaches the path of pure devotion and self-surrender. Through the works of Sri Muruganar such as *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham* Sri Bhagavan has revealed the greatness and power of His Grace. He has set a shining example of dedicated and one-pointed devotion, He has demonstrated how the paths of bhakti and *jnana* are inseparably interrelated, and He has thereby shown the true and practical spiritual path to be followed by all of us who aspire for egolessness. And above all, through the humble and self-effacing life lived by Sri Muruganar Sri Bhagavan has exemplified how a true devotee should live his life in this world: unattached to the world, unknown to the world, and uncaring for the appreciation of the world – in the world but not of the world!

It is because the Grace of the Lord thus works through His true, egoless devotees, helping to uplift us less mature souls, that devotion to the devotees is so highly prized in the Indian tradition. Indeed, in the Saivite tradition of Tamil Nadu, which provided the cultural background for both Sri Bhagavan and Sri Muruganar, one is taught to revere the devotee as God Himself, and the greatness of the devotion to the devotees is one of the principal themes of the *Periya Puranam*, the great poem which recounts the lives of the sixty-three Saivite Saints and which moved Sri Bhagavan so deeply when, as a fifteen-year old schoolboy, He first read it. This ancient custom of revering the devotees of the Lord so highly has also been approved and sanctioned by Sri Bhagavan in verse 104 of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*, in which He sings. “Oh Arunachala, bless me so that I may become the devotee of the devotees of the devotees who hear Your name with love! “Let us therefore

become the devotees of the devotees of Sri Muruganar, the great devotee who always heard the name of Sri Arunachala-Ramana with heart-melting love!

## 66. On Birthday

**By Bhagavan**

**T**hese verses were written by Bhagavan when it was proposed for the first time that his birthday should be celebrated:

1. All you who would a birthday celebrate  
Should first find out whence we are really born.  
For that alone of birth is the true date  
Whereon one enters the eternal state  
That transcends birth and death, which is indeed  
Eternal Being, when the soul is freed.
2. Upon this day at least you ought to mourn  
Your entry in the world. To celebrate  
And glory in the day when you were born  
Is like a man delighting to adorn  
A putrid corpse. To seek the Self, this is  
To merge within the Self. True Wisdom this!

In reply to this the translator handed Bhagavan the following:

You tell me not to celebrate  
The day when I was born.  
Seeing it led me to Thy Feet  
Why, therefore, should I mourn?  
  
Births in the past were filled with woe  
But this one's free from pain;  
For having Thee I surely know  
That Freedom I'll attain.

## 67. The Grace of Arunachala Siva\*

It has been said that the work of healing is often the work of narration. With this thought in mind I have written my story, my memories of a major accident, treatment and my return to Tiruvannamalai. These events were borne from devotion and love. The manifestation of the Self through love is what has given me strength. This love has been selflessly given by those who knew me either little or not at all. It is this simplicity of giving, of time, thoughts, prayers and even blood that has helped me become stronger and kept my hopes light and full. I have been shown that the heart of a true sadhaka shines forth in coming to the aid of another through the gift of selfless service.

A few minutes past 5 am, on a Tuesday in February 2010, I left my room with the intention of meeting my friends for *pradakshina* of the holy mountain Arunachala. A few days previously I had organized this walk as I wanted to share some time with two very dear friends, Purnima and Ryan. I had set the time, the date and the meeting place, something I had never done before. It is only now in retrospect that it seems as if the drama was being written then. A few days before I had moved into the ashram, celebrated my 40th birthday and *Mahasivaratri* by walking around the mountain barefoot chanting the *Mrityunjaya* mantra! I had begun to make plans to settle and make a home at the foot of my beloved mountain. And yet I still felt something empty inside me. There was a persistent sadness and a longing for union, connection and love. I felt distant, separate and alone. The night before the accident my thoughts were heavy and I walked around Bhagavan's samadhi feeling impelled to walk one more time as if asking for a blessing to keep me safe, just in case.

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\* This is an edited version of an article by Anna Du Chesne, *The Mountain Path*, April 2011.

Leaving my room took a few moments longer than usual, still half asleep after a restless night, I forgot my key and then had to go back again for water. I made my way out of the library compound, towards the ashram gates, thinking of the coming walk and feeling the coolness of the morning. As I walked past the Dakshinamurti shrine I did pranam, requesting a blessing.

The following moments are a blur. My head still cloudy with sleep, I heard a loud sound behind me. This is not unusual in India as often the roadsides are full of screaming horns and rattling lorries. I turned slowly to see what the commotion was, impelled by some sense on the street, from others who were also walking. I turned to face the centre of the road.

In the next moment I found myself on the ground and everything that followed happened slowly and simultaneously...

Fireworks! The electrical power board is hit and it is as if it is diwali! The visual impact of the flashing lights, the aural impact of the screaming sizzling wires initially superseded the physical.

Sitting in the dirt on the side of the road, slowly coming to realise what was happening, it was as if this was God/Siva/Swami's way of announcing this super real moment in my life.

My instant reaction was to get up, to stand on my own two feet and move on. I placed my hands on the ground to lift myself up, to stand up. It was only then that I realised the intensity of the situation. I looked down at my leg and I knew. I knew that my life would never be the same again. I knew that I would lose my leg. This strong inner knowing broke through the chaos and confusion. It was then that I looked at my sweet hill of grace, Oh Arunachala! I think I may even have smiled. It was as if I knew I was caught. I knew I had been bitten. I saw the mountain shining down on me. I may have laughed and said to myself – "Well, you wanted something? You were looking for love? You want to grow? Well WAKE UP!.... BOOM!!! What are you teaching

me dearest mountain?" I remembered the previous evening's *parayana*, in which I had joined with others singing of my love for the mountain and bemoaning my fate as a prisoner bound by this love. This silent roar from the mountain would keep me connected and open to what was to come.

"Help!" The lessons began now. Never wanting to ask people for anything, never wanting to cause bother and priding myself on my independence, my first impulse was to simply move on, on my own. It was only after the few seconds of shock, and silent communication with the mountain, that reality took her firm grasp on me and I cried out "Help!". I think I began to scream. The pain started to get very real and I became scared, realising I was helpless. That such a strong impulse (to look after myself) had been torn from me was what struck me the deepest. I need other people! I had to call for help. Due to my great love and respect for the people who work in the ashram, my heart turned to them. I called out "Ramanasramam! Get the ashram people!" or some such thing as I was afraid I would be left. I did not know who was already there and already looking after me...

From here I believe the love started to flow. Again it was the mountain speaking to me, "You wanted love? Well here it comes!" I felt that through tearing off my leg, love was able to flow. I am not sure from where it came but it came. People started to appear.

A man who owns the fruit stand opposite the ashram gates came and cradled me, letting me place my weight on him as he supported my back. It was so dark that the faces who appeared were a blur. A few I recognized in the small crowd at the ashram gates. A devotee whom I had recently met, came and sat beside me. She took my hand and repeated gently, "You are going to be ok! You are going to live!" My friend Ryan appeared and it was such relief to see him. Finally, my friend Purnima appeared, with her presence I felt I could relax a little, as I knew she would do everything that was needed to keep me safe.

Pain! In the moment there was pain that is difficult to describe, pain that took my breath away, pain that took me out of my body so that the only way I could comprehend it was to float above myself watching, dissecting and dissociating myself from the physical body. In these moments there was a great awareness of the nature of the body as a vessel or a shell, nothing more. And then BOOM! the pain would wrack through my body and my mind would again be overcome. I would swing back to observing. I was thinking, “Well, this is it! Here is my chance to really observe, to examine the pain of the body and see where it comes from.” I repeated to myself, “I am not this pain, this pain is not me. There is just pain...” And then Bang! I would be back deep in the mind of the pain.

In the moments my mind detached itself from the body, my thoughts became enormous. I was only able to understand or relate at a deep universal level. I felt such overwhelming compassion for all those who must experience this pain. I was struck by the injustice of it. I felt nothing of myself. I could only use my experience to feel and understand the horror that is senselessly inflicted on others. It was as if I had a deep insight into the minds, emotions and hearts of so many, as if I were linked into their suffering. Why must others, victims of war or land mines experience this? How is it possible that this kind of pain is experienced by so many soldiers, innocent civilians, animals...?

Finally, the ambulance came and the commotion continued. There was no stretcher initially and as they were attempting to lift me I had to instruct them to bring something to lift my leg. I was fearful as they seemed ready to just throw me onto the stretcher without a thought for the lower leg that was barely connected to the rest of me. I was reminded of a teacher of mine who once told a story of a woman in a terrible situation. She maintained her peace of mind by directing the attackers, telling them how the event was to be handled. I remained conscious throughout this event as I too wanted to ensure that this horror would be my responsibility.



I think the worst part of the whole morning was lying in Tiruvannamalai hospital. I can clearly remember the pain, coming in crashing waves. The shock and nausea was made worse by not trusting that I was in the right place and then not quite believing what was happening. I was also feeling annoyed and agitated by the overly curious people in the waiting room where I was left. I have a strong image of lying on the stretcher in what seemed like a waiting room. The walls were green and it was dark. I could not move for the pain and had been left, pushed to the side of the room, near a corridor. The people in the waiting room began to come and peer at me. I remember moaning and just wishing they would all go away and leave me alone. All I wanted was to retreat, to disappear, to go into hiding. I remember biting Purnima's hand in an effort to quell the pain. I remember the dissociation I was experiencing in my mind and my body. And yet, in spite of this tremendous fear and pain, I felt the presence of the mountain. I remember knowing God was with me and realising that God never leaves. Those moments of silent communication had calmed the core of my mind. I had no concept of what was to come yet I knew God was with me. In the worst moments I found myself chanting "OM nama sivaya!", over and over in a effort to further calm my mind and to call on his grace to help me through this torment.

When I arrived at the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore I was even telling the nurses not to throw away my clothes, that I would not need a ventilator and making sure my mother was called. In the first few days at the hospital, I did not really care or understand what was happening. It may have been the morphine or it may have been the shock of the intensity of the situation. The fuse box fireworks for me seemed to be the visual equal of my emotional impact. I was lost somewhere in another world. My visitors were so concerned for my wellbeing that I was delighted to see them. I never felt much sadness at my situation and was often more concerned for the plight of others. At the same time as

my amputation was to take place a woman was brought into the HDC. There had been a terrible road accident and her husband and child had died. As I lay waiting for my operation I could hear her inconsolable wailing! My heart went out to her...I had just lost part of my leg and yet she had lost her whole family.

Finally, the time came for the amputation and I was again blessed to have my eldest sister with me. Her love for me, coupled with her training as a clinical psychologist, provided me with the firmest foundation of emotional support imaginable. In preparation for this major operation we sat for a few minutes praising and honouring my beautiful left leg. We spoke about the joy I felt feeling sand between my toes, diving off rocks into the ocean, the freedom my foot had given me and the great distances this foot had taken me – the sights I had seen!

The operation was very long and traumatic. I woke up in ICU in terror as I had had hallucinogenic nightmares of running, climbing and moving about with two legs. These dreams were so real that upon waking at 2 a.m. I became quite hysterical and started to go into shock. My sister was called and I fell into her arms crying, “I don’t know what is real anymore! I don’t know what is real anymore!”

The final operation was the worst. The heat was unbearable and as with all the previous operations I was not allowed to drink water or take any food for hours beforehand. My sister came with me and I was lead through the maze that is CMC. We arrived at the theatre and had to wait in the corridor. I still had the memory of the previous three operations in my mind and was scared that there would be more pain. I closed my eyes and meditated. As I calmed my mind, I imagined angels holding me, sweet doves with the eyes of love of Ramana. I went to God, and felt God holding me, soothing me in the heat...

The doctors and nurses who cared for me were incredible. I feel very fortunate to have had such a professional and

experienced team of doctors looking after me. One of the senior doctors admired my pictures of Ramana that had been put up in my room. He told me of his recent visit to Tiruvannamalai and his day spent in the ashram. Again, I realised here was God looking after me. As the CMC is a Christian hospital the nurses would sing hymns of Christ in the morning. Before every operation they would stand around me and pray for a ‘safe’ result.

People were so generous with their time and energy. A relay of people gladly came from Tiruvannamalai to give blood.

In the days after the operation and my return to Australia I found the intensity of the love continued to flow.

Below are some entries from my diary and from letters received and sent.

One of the messages read: “Nevertheless the events that happened to Ms. Anna is not mysterious at least to me because in the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna has said that he would indeed go to any extent, including ruining the life of someone who is dear to Him. In so many saint’s lives He has come to accept them by similar means of diverting them to Him by giving them troubles. If some such thing should happen to a devotee who was planning to go for a *pradakshina* that too early in the morning certainly it is only a blessing though it may look different in the eyes of others....”

### **More from Letters and Diary**

4th March to Rose:

“I believe that this event is a blessing, a kiss from Siva, waking me up to my true nature and bringing me closer and closer into the Heart. I would love to speak with you and hear any wisdom you may be willing to share with me.

“I am learning that nothing is certain and I have no idea of what is to come – so I can only focus on what is happening right now...liberating really!”

12th March to Ryan:

“Some of these images that kept me going...I will write again with a list of things I want you to do, like listen to a peacock for me, gaze at the monkeys being naughty and smile as the ghee is poured on your rice at lunch...the glance upwards at the hill...magnificent green against the soft blue.”

14th March:

“... in these moments no predictions or reflections of past or future make much impact...nothing can be as great or as real as what is happening in my life right now! Every day is uncertain and fresh, the pains come and go, sleep comes and goes...being so still I must sit and observe my friends and family as they rush in and out of my view from the couch...

“Emotionally I am pretty numb, I have not yet cried or felt much sadness over the loss and the chaos of the accident. There is such a feeling of perfection about all this – as if it **COULD NOT BE ANY OTHER WAY** – that sadness seems impossible. I feel held, loved and cared for...which allows stillness and surrender to unfold sweetly. I have never been at a place in my life where I have known less about what is to come – before I always had an (often fear filled) image of possible future events – and now? I really don’t know...and as a result there is no fear! I project and plan for difficulty – learning to walk again, falling over, possible pain of the prosthesis? but really I don’t know...YEAH! It is good not to know.”

23rd March to Thomas:

“...I feel like cutting off the lower leg (it’s really just a 1/4! – about 10 cm below my knee) was like cutting open a reservoir or spring of LOVE – people from all over the world have sent me love, blood, flowers, friendship...and I am learning to receive, to be gracious and invite this in...

“I will slowly begin to learn how to walk again, find my balance...I feel as though all the years of yoga, meditation, self-enquiry and observation are my strength now – now I

must use them as I begin to swim...many of the old mind games and crazy insecurities that kept me small have completely been blown up, destroyed – this is the joy of this madness! Now I see what is really important...”

5th April to Clive and Miranda:

“I have been overwhelmed by the grace of a very very dear group of friends – so much support! so much kindness! This whole event really has brought me to my knees...in truth I am humbled and find myself at the beginning of a frustrating yet beautifully essential opening and LETTING GO!!!!

“It is incredible how many beliefs and concepts are falling away – those that keep me fearful and doubting are losing their grip! How can this not be grace. So there is joy in this madness...even living in Sydney!”

23rd April to Ryan:

“When I read your letters I am instantly with Arunachala, thank you. I am crying – it is obviously Arunachala tapping my heart open....”

17th May:

“This step on the spiritual path is all about stillness... this stillness being reflected in an acceptance of what IS!!!!!! How wonderful: No grasping, comparing, wishing or hoping for difference – rather a peace filled stillness in the present...

“So challenging!!!!”

30th May to Purnima:

“When I really think about (returning to TVM) I get a little scared and am aware that I still ‘jump’ whenever I hear a truck bang past me – if I am inside or on the street... so there is still work to be done on releasing some of the trauma that I am holding onto...A thought just occurred to me – I am living my life like a person practising a walking meditation – awareness, awareness, awareness...step by step... the destination is no longer my focus...”

7th June to David:

“I am doing very well, walking around on my new leg – still a little clumsy and using crutches. The doctors are all amazed at my determination and fast recovery. I tell them that it is because I have so much love in my life, so many wonderful people who have shown me friendship....thank you!”

19th June to Bobbie:

“Ahhhh...a day does not go by in which my heart flies to Tiruvannamalai....And you are there!!! I think of walking around the mountain with you...resting (because I am learning to slow down!) on the rocks...sitting under the mountain.”

5th August to *Gita*:

“I am walking with such ease that I am often surprised and laugh at the simplicity of my mind – that forgets the trauma, the frustration and the difficulty it once faced. I have found enduring love and support from all my friends, family and colleagues. A day does not go by in which I am not greeted by friends and acquaintances delighted to see me and thrilled at my recovery! How lucky am I!!!!”

## 68. My Pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam\*

### Crisis in Life

A few years ago, I reached a crisis in my life. After years of Anguish and sleepless nights, I was in a critical condition. When things seemed darkest I had an unusual feeling that I should go away. I discussed it with my twin, Betty, and decided to take a trip around the world. After making the reservation I became very ill and had to cancel it. One obstacle after another presented itself until it seemed as though I were

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\* Eleanor Pauline Noye (California), *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*.

not to go and being so ill I did not care if I went or not. Still there always seemed to be something urging me to go and my sister also felt that I should. After a few weeks of rest, I felt better and made reservations on another ship that was to sail a month later, but when the time arrived for sailing I was still not able to leave my bed. The boat sailed from San Francisco through the Panama Canal reaching New Orleans a month later. The steamship agent suggested my going there by train, which takes three days instead of one month, hoping I would feel better in the meantime.

I had a very trying trip to New Orleans, and upon arriving I collapsed and was taken to a Christian Science practitioner's home, where they put me to bed and took care of me. They thought I was in no condition to take a long trip, but I felt as though I must. I could not turn back. Fortunately, the boat was two weeks late; otherwise I would not have been able to sail. The steamship agent said, "You do not look very well. If the Captain sees you I am afraid he will not take you, as we do not carry a physician." However, finally he agreed to my going but said, "Do not let the Captain see you until we are out at sea." Though outward conditions were very dark, I went, knowing that God would take care of me. I felt as though I were led and if I had not followed that inner voice which prompted me I would never have had the blessed experience of finding the happiest part of my life in the presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

### **I Want to Find Myself**

The doctor who vaccinated me before I left, knew that I was not well. He said, "Why are you taking the trip?" I replied, "I want to find myself." I was seeking something I had not found – Peace. Somehow my mind would always turn to India, especially during those days when I was in bed.

We sailed from New Orleans to Cape Town, South Africa, a three weeks' trip without a stop. Providence was with me again, for had the boat stopped, I believe, I would

have returned home. But God had other plans for me. I was torn between conflicting emotions and became worse again. My prayers seemed of no avail. I would have the most dreadful nightmares and wake up crying. I could not bear it any longer; so, I sent a radiogram to the doctor: “Need help in every way, especially at night. Cold much worse; filled with fear. Will write from Cape Town.” I don’t know what I was afraid of, but my mind was never at peace. I felt better for a while but found it necessary to send a second cable. Therefore, had the boat stopped on its way to Cape Town, I should have disembarked and returned home. But Providence has always the upper hand. When we reached Cape Town, I felt much better; but as I did not like that ship I disembarked at Durban, South Africa, where I spent one month waiting for another boat.

### **Arriving in India**

As we approached India I decided to get off at Madras, instead of going on to Calcutta, where the ship would be in dry-dock for two weeks. The people on board gave all sorts of reasons why I should not get off at Madras. It was very difficult to leave them; nevertheless, I did, so they took me to the Connemara Hotel, saying it was not safe to stop at a second-rate hotel because of the food, etc. After my friends had gone I felt lost and went to my room and, with tears in my eyes, prayed for guidance. All night the heat was intense, so the next morning I asked the proprietor if he could suggest a cooler place. He said the hill station Kodaikanal was lovely and cool. So, I made my plans to leave Madras immediately. Motoring there, I found it to be a charming place. The very first day I met two Hindu brothers and I asked them if they knew any Seers? I have no explanation to offer as to why I put that question. I anticipated nothing. They said they knew of one at Tiruvannamalai, Sri Ramana Maharshi. “People come from far and near to see Him. He left home,” they said, “when he was twelve-years old and never went to school.



He is the greatest Seer in India. It is difficult to find one that is genuine.” This is what they told me about Bhagavan; of course, these facts are not accurate.

I decided to leave for Tiruvannamalai the next day.

My friends helped me in every way, told me to buy some bedding, etc., but did not tell me that it was the custom to take a gift to the Holy Man; in fact, I knew nothing about life at an Ashram. When I left Madras I had no idea I would have this experience, but was eager to go, and felt as though something momentous was about to happen.

When I told the guests in the hotel my plans, they said it was not safe to go alone, as the place (the Ashram) was in a jungle, and I would not endure the hardships and humidity, as I had been in India only a few days and was not acclimatized. An English official and his wife insisted upon getting all the details in order to keep track of me. I bought a ticket for Madurai as my friends told me to see the temples there, but I decided not to go to Madurai, as I was anxious to reach my destination. So, I left the car at Kodaikanal Road and took the train for Tiruvannamalai.

### **At the Ashram**

After arriving there I engaged a bullock cart to take me to the Ashram, where I was greeted by some of the inmates, including Niranjanananda Swami, brother of Sri Bhagavan. They told me that Sri Bhagavan was on the hill, but would be in the hall shortly, and graciously invited me to have my breakfast. My heart throbbed with expectation as I was taken to the hall. As I entered it I felt the atmosphere was filled with Sri Bhagavan’s purity and blessedness. One feels a breath of the Divine in the Sage’s presence. He was sitting on a couch, clad only in a loincloth, surrounded by His devotees. When He smiled it was as though the gates of Heaven were thrown open. I have never seen eyes more alight with Divine Illumination – they shine like stars. He greeted me very tenderly and made some enquiries about me, which put me

at ease. His look of Love and Compassion was a benediction that went straight to my heart. I was immediately drawn to Him. His greatness and kindness is all embracing. One feels such an uplifting influence in His Saintly Presence and cannot help but sense His extraordinary spirituality. It is not necessary for Him to talk. His silent influence of Love and Light is more potent than words could ever be. I did not know what manner of man I expected to find. But once I saw Him, I said to myself, ‘Surely, there is no one like Sri Bhagavan!’ I do not think there is another like Him on earth today. To see Him is to love Him. After spending the morning with Him, I had lunch at eleven o’clock and rested until 2 p.m. Then I returned to the hall. As I looked upon Sri Bhagavan’s serene face and into His eyes, which beamed with mercy, my soul was stirred. He knew how much I needed Him, while He looked straight into my heart. Everyone who comes to Him is blessed; the inner Peace, which is His, is radiated to all. A beautiful sight are the little children, kneeling before the Master as He blesses them and smiles so tenderly, sometimes taking one in His arms, reminding me of the painting, “Christ Blessing the Children.” Later I walked around the grounds, talked to the devotees. At seven o’clock I had a light meal; then I had the opportunity to say just a few words to Sri Bhagavan about my journey. Sometime later I went to the Traveller’s Bungalow, as ladies are not allowed to stay in the Ashram at night.

I would like to say here, that the one reason why I had been in such a rundown condition was that I had not slept well for years, although I had been taking medicine, which never gave me any relief. Although I said nothing to Sri Bhagavan about this, the amazing thing was that I slept soundly the first night and thereafter without taking any medicine, though I lacked the many comforts I had been accustomed to. I received “the Medicine of all medicines, the unfailing grace of the Lord, whose name is Heart.” I arose next morning, feeling refreshed, as though I were born anew. Soon after,

one afternoon, as I was standing by the gate, Sri Bhagavan stopped, while on His way to the Hillside, and asked me if I had more peace. His loving solicitude made me feel quite at home; and when He smiled, my joy knew no bounds.

During those sacred hours with the Master I unconsciously absorbed the Truth, which He embodies; it filled all my being. My love blossomed into deep devotion and I was filled with ineffable peace. The things which seemed so vital before were no longer of any importance. I could see things in their correct perspective; the heartaches of yesterday and thoughts of tomorrow faded into oblivion. Here, in the Ashram, far away from the noise and confusion of the busy highways, silence reigns. It is broken only by the bleating of the sheep and goats and the songs of the birds and the shepherd's song as he takes his flocks home to rest. Time seems to stand still in this peaceful, sacred retreat, amidst the beauties of nature, with its lovely flower gardens and beautiful pools, which are surrounded by knarred oak-like trees, that greet you like old friends. It is so primitive, but therein lies its charm. It is truly the Holy Land. The air is permeated with His peace and love. Looking upon eternal Arunachala, 'The Hill of Light,' one is filled with awe and is overwhelmed by a great Spiritual Power. Everything is vibrant and speaks to us in Silence. On full-moon night it is especially inspiring to go around the hill. In this deep silence and quietude, one readily hears the voice of God. In the inspiring words of the Master from the Five Hymns to Arunachala: "Only to convey by Silence Thy Transcendent State Thou standest as a Hill, shining from heaven to earth." One may also say with the Psalmist, "Be Still and Know That I Am God." These were among the first words spoken to me by Sri Bhagavan and the last ones before I left for America. I had always loved to meditate upon them, but now they seemed to take on a new meaning and filled my heart with bliss. I had been at the Ashram for two months, then made arrangements to sail one month later. I wanted to know more about India before going home. So, I reluctantly

made plans to leave the place. I had grown to love it and was very sad during those last days. Bhagavan said, “I will always be with you, wherever you go.”

When the last day arrived, I could not stop crying. Therefore, I did not go to the hall but sat by the pool. In the afternoon when I sat before Bhagavan, He smiled and said, “She has been crying all day; she does not want to leave Me.” He was so sweet and tender. Later I went to Him for His blessing; the pain of parting was almost more than I could bear; with tears in my eyes I knelt in deepest reverence and devotion before my Beloved Master. May He always be my Father, Mother and God; and may I always be His child, and whatever I do, may it be in His Name!

I then said goodbye to the devotees who had been so kind to me. As I drove to the station in the little cart, my heart grew heavy because I was leaving my Bhagavan, but I had so very much to be thankful for, having had the privilege of spending two months in His presence and been blessed beyond measure. Indeed, I was not the same person who had come to Him two months earlier. When I reached Madras I wanted to return to Bhagavan, I really did not want to tour India; nevertheless, I went from Madras to Srinagar in Kashmir, then to Calcutta (wherefrom I expected to sail for America). I had a pleasant trip, stopped at many interesting places along the way and was led to many people who were helpful and kind. What I would like to bring out is the way in which I was guided and protected. I had some blessed experiences, also two breathtaking ones on the train, and on one occasion I narrowly escaped death. It was the hottest season of the year, yet I felt no ill effects. A physician who was stopping at the same hotel in Agra said it was miraculous the way I travelled in the heat; he had seen strong Hindus drop like flies owing to the heat, which did not seem to bother me. I could hear Bhagavan’s words: “I will always be with you, wherever you go.” His dear face was always before me, no matter what I was doing. His presence filled all my heart. My eyes were

filled with tears many times as I thought of returning to America without seeing Him again. One day I seemed to hear Him say, ‘Come back to Me again’. During the time I was separated from the Master my love and faith had deepened, and I decided to return to Him as soon as possible.

### **Returning to the Master**

I changed my plans. Instead of going back to America by the next boat, I took the train, leaving Calcutta for Tiruvannamalai. Queer to say, I felt as though I were going home! The tender way Bhagavan greeted me, as I stood before him, will live in my heart always. I wept with joy knowing I was thrice blessed in being able to return to him. As I basked in his Eternal Sunshine in those silent hours of communion I was filled with his Grace.

It is a privilege to have some meals with the Master; to eat the food that he has handled is in itself a blessing. He would rise at dawn and help cut the vegetables, very often helping also to prepare special dishes that were delicious. The devotees prepared special food for me, and it was wholesome and good. Bhagavan was always considerate to everyone, he wanted to be sure there was plenty of everything; and the rich and poor received the same kind attention, as also the animals; no distinction was ever shown. One day I saw Bhagavan stoop down and pick up three grains of rice. That simple act taught me much more than what I could have learnt by studying ten volumes on domestic economy which is so essential in present day life but is so difficult to practice. Each day brought new lessons and Blessings. He grew nearer and dearer to me as time passed and my only wish was to be by his side.

### **Silent Adoration**

The monsoon was on, the air was fresh and clean, and all the earth seemed radiant. Whenever it rained Bhagavan’s attendants put a white cloth on his chest to protect his body

from the cold weather. He looked like a sweet child wearing a bib, and with all his wisdom and greatness one is struck by his childlike nature. At other times he looks like the King of kings; His poise and dignity are outstanding. When sometimes at night he would throw a shawl over his head, he looked like the Madonna. I would stand outside in silent adoration. Again, at other times he looked like a devoted father, smiling upon his children. I loved to watch him as he walked up the hill, just when the sun was setting. And it was my greatest delight when I could go with him.

One morning I picked a lovely rose; my first thought was to give it to the Master. A devotee said, “What a beautiful rose!”

I replied, “Yes, it is for Bhagavan.” I sat in the hall, wondering if I should give it to him. After a few minutes I laid it on the small footstool near his sofa, and he said, “What is that?”

I replied, “Only a rose.”

He said, “Give it to me.” He took the rose and touched it to his forehead and cheeks. I was so deeply touched, I wept.

### **The 1939 Jayanti**

I had the great privilege of being at the Ashram in 1939 for Sri Bhagavan’s birthday celebration when, as on such occasions, thousands of people were fed. He is, indeed, a friend of the poor. A special leaf-covered shelter is erected for the occasion, so that many devotees who come for the celebration may sit in the presence of Bhagavan. One can never forget the Master as he sits there on his couch so majestically, amidst garlands of flowers, surrounded by his loving devotees, who are so happy to be with him at that time. It is a day of rejoicing and thanksgiving for everyone, even the animals.

As I walked along that night and looked at Arunachala, so silent, I was held spellbound by the beautiful sight. The brightest star in the heavens shone directly above its peak,

like a great Beacon Light to tell us, as it were: “This is the Holy Land, the abode of Bhagavan, the Lord of the Universe, whose greatness and spiritual power have drawn men from the remote parts of the earth, who come and kneel down and worship him, singing songs of adoration and praise to proclaim his glory.”

### **Lord of Love**

When I left America, I longed for Peace; there was a yearning in my heart that would not let me rest. Here at the feet of the Lord of Love, peace and happiness garlanded me and enriched my being. I know that Bhagavan led me to this haven of rest. In the words of Sri Bhagavan himself:

To quote a letter from the Ashram: “So then, Sri Bhagavan will guide you at every step; for, has he not guided you even before you knew you were really in search of him?”

### **Leaving the Ashram**

I had been planning to leave the Ashram for five months, but each time I thought I was going, something unforeseen presented itself. It was not his will that I should go. Bhagavan says, “Your plans are of no avail.” I did not want to go but felt I should. My twin sister wrote several times and said there were matters which needed my attention; and she was very ill, although I did not know it at the time, somehow, I sensed it. That was probably the reason why I felt I should leave.

As the time to leave drew near I was very sad; I knew this time I would really go. It had been eight months since I returned to the Ashram for the second time! Those last days I spent with the Master were blissful. He was so kind and tender, and when he smiled at me, tears would fill my eyes. I wondered how I could ever leave the place. When the day of parting came, I could not stop crying. In the morning, I walked on the Hill with Bhagavan and some other devotees; then again in the afternoon, when we had our pictures taken

with him. As I walked down the Hill with him for the last time he alone knew what was in my heart.

The little monkeys were all lined upon either side of the hill-path. Bhagavan told them to come and say goodbye to me. He knew I loved them also. When we reached the hall, Bhagavan read a few comforting passages from Psalms, Chapter 139, verses 7, 8, 9, and 10.\* He invited me to have supper with him, as ladies are not allowed in the dining hall at night. It was blessed joy to have that last meal with the Master. I shall never forget it.

Just before I left I went to him for his blessing and wept at his feet, as my heart overflowed with adoration and love. He is dearer to me than life itself. May I consecrate my life to him! Then I said good-bye to the devotees in the Ashram, who were invariably kind to me.

I have tried in my humble way to tell about the wonderful experience I had when I was at Sri Ramanasramam with the Enlightened One, but mere words can never express the peace and joy one feels in his Presence; it must be experienced. There, one truly has a glimpse of the Eternal.

As I am writing this article in 1946 (six years after I left the Ashram), I would like to say that I have felt the Master's Presence more and more with the passage of time, just as he said I would. My devotion and faith have grown through the years and will never be shaken under any circumstances. I am very happy to say that I shall be returning soon to my Beloved Master. I hear his call!

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\* Psalms, Chapter 139, verse 7. Whither shall I go from thy spirit?  
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

verse 8. If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

verse 9. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

verse 10. Even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.



Needless to say, this was the most blessed experience of my life, my stay at the feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, the Lord of Love and Compassion. May I be worthy of the many blessings and the great Love he has so graciously bestowed upon me!

## To Beloved Bhagavan, the Lord of Love

Oh Lord of Love, Who dwells within my heart!  
May I sing Thy Praise through all Eternity,  
Thou, the Adorable One, the All compassionate,  
Whose Loving smile illumines all the world,  
Who art tender as a mother and strong as a father,  
Thou, whose sublime life is an inspiring sermon,  
Fill me with Thy Presence, Beloved Master, with the  
Nectar of Thy Grace;  
May Thy great Love and Light fill my heart to the full.  
Resting secure in Thy Presence  
And knowing whence cometh Peace,  
Guidance and Strength,  
May I always listen; for, in the Silence  
I hear Thy Voice, –  
The Voice of God.

– *Eleanor Pauline Noye*  
(California)

## 69. Merits and Demerits (Fruits of Karma)\*

**B**hagavan was most tender with people who thought themselves for some reason or other to be miserable sinners and who went to him torn by repentance.

During summer evenings we used to sit in the open space near the well. We would collect in the dining hall for dinner and come back to the well. Suddenly, one day, a visitor started weeping bitterly, “I am a horrible sinner. For a long time, I have been coming to your feet, but there is no change in me. Can I become pure at last? How long am I to wait? When I am here near you I am good for a time, but when I leave this place I become a beast again. You cannot imagine how bad I can be hardly a human being. Am I to remain a sinner forever?”

Bhagavan answered: “Why do you come to me? What have I to do with you? What is there between us that you should come here and weep and cry in front of me?”

The man started moaning and crying even more, as if his heart were breaking. “All my hopes of salvation are gone. You were my last refuge and you say you have nothing to do with me! To whom shall I turn now? What am I to do? To whom am I to go?”

Bhagavan watched him for some time and said, “Am I your guru that I should be responsible for your salvation? Have I ever said that I am your master?”

“If you are not my master, then who is? And who are you, if not my master? You are my guru, you are my guardian angel, you will pity me and release me from my sins!” He started sobbing and crying again.

We all sat silent, overcome with pity. Only Bhagavan looked alert and matter-of-fact.

**Bhagavan:** “If I am your guru, what are my fees? Surely you should pay me for my services.”

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\* Krishna Bhikshu, *The Power of the Presence – Part 3*.

**Devotee:** “But you won’t take anything,” cried the visitor. “What can I give you?”

Bh.: “Did I ever say that I don’t take anything? And did you ever ask me what you can give me?”

D.: “If you would take, then ask me. There is nothing I would not give you.”

Bh.: “All right. Now I am asking. Give me. What will you give me?”

D.: “Take anything, all is yours.”

Bh.: “Then give me all the good you have done in this world.”

D.: “What good could I have done? I have not a single virtue to my credit.”

Bh.: “You have promised to give. Now give. Don’t talk of your credit. Just give away all the good you have done in your past.”

D.: “Yes, I shall give. But how does one give? Tell me how the giving is done and I shall give.”

Bh.: “Say like this: ‘All the good I have done in the past I am giving away entirely to my guru. Henceforth I have no merit from it nor have I any concern with it.’ Say it with your whole heart.”

D.: “All right, Swami, I am giving away to you all the good I have done so far, if I have done any, and all its good effects. I am giving it to you gladly, for you are my master and you are asking me to give it all away to you.”

Bh.: “But this is not enough,” said Bhagavan sternly.

D.: “I gave you all I have and all you asked me to give. I have nothing more to give.”

Bh.: “No, you have. Give me all your sins.”

D.: The man looked wildly at Bhagavan, terror-stricken. “You do not know, Swami, what you are asking for. If you knew, you would not ask me. If you take over my sins, your body will rot and burn. You do not know me; you do not know my sins. Please do not ask me for my sins.” And he wept bitterly.

Bh.: “I shall look after myself, don’t you worry about me,” said Bhagavan. “All I want from you is your sins.”

For a long time, the bargain would not go through. The man refused to part with his sins. But Bhagavan was adamant.

Bh.: “Either give me your sins along with your merits, or keep both and don’t think of me as your master.”

In the end the visitor’s scruples broke down and he declared: “Whatever sins I have done, they are no longer mine. All of them and their results, too, belong to Ramana.”

Bhagavan seemed to be satisfied. “From now on there is no good nor bad in you. You are just pure. Go and do nothing, neither good nor bad. Remain yourself, remain what you are.”

A great peace fell over the man and over us all. No one knows what happened to the fortunate visitor; he was never seen in the Ashram again. He might have been in no further need of coming.

Another time, a visitor started wailing before Bhagavan that he was being quite crushed under the enormity of his sins.

Bhagavan asked: “When you sleep, are you a sinner?”

D.: “No, I am just asleep.”

Bh.: “If you are not a sinner, then you must be good.”

D.: “No, I am neither good nor bad when I am asleep. I know nothing about myself.”

Bh.: “And what do you know about yourself now? You say you are a sinner. You say so because you think so. Were you pleased with yourself, you would call yourself a good man and stop telling me about you being a sinner. What do you know about good and evil except what is in your mind? When you see that the mind invents everything, all will vanish. The good will vanish, the evil will vanish, and you will remain as you are.”

Once a visitor said: “I have been coming to you, Swami, many times, hoping that something will happen and I shall be changed. So far I do not see any change in me. I am as I was,

a weakling of a man, an inveterate sinner.” And he started weeping piteously.

“On this road there are no milestones,” replied Bhagavan. “How can you know in which direction you are going? Why don’t you do what the first-class railway passenger does? He tells the guard his destination, locks the doors and goes to sleep. The rest is done by the guard. If you could trust your guru as much as you trust the railway guard, it would be quite enough to make you reach your destination. Your business is to shut the door and windows and sleep. The guard will wake you up at your destination.”

## **70. Excerpts from a Video Interview with Padma Venkataraman\***

### **Part I**

I first went to see Bhagavan in the year 1947. On that occasion, after going in the morning, seeing Bhagavan and having his darshan, when everybody, all the devotees, were sitting all together, a desire arose within me to be alone with Bhagavan and tell him what was on my mind. My husband then approached the ashram manager, Niranjanananda Swami, and spoke to him about my indifference to worldly life (*virakti*), and about my desire for the grace of the guru. When my husband, whose name is Ramani, went and enquired with Niranjanananda Swami about these matters, he replied, ‘Bhagavan, actually, will return to the hall at a quarter past two. But the devotees will not come in till half past two. At that time, then, if there is anything you want to ask, you can ask it in private.’

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\* ‘First Meeting with Bhagavan’, Transcript from July and October 2016 *Mountain Path*, Translated by Robert Butler.

What happened then was, when the two of us were sitting together, I said, ‘Buy one of Bhagavan’s books...’ – the time would have been gone half past one – ‘...go and buy one of Bhagavan’s books.’ I had not read any of the shastras. I had not read any of the works on Vedanta. But in all situations a profound desire for a teacher is required. Through Bhagavan, through his grace, I think he called me to him. I bowed my head to him, so to speak. He (my husband) bought the book ‘Nan Yar?’ (‘Who am I?’) and gave it to me before the bookstore closed, it being the lunch hour. So that was what I was reading. Previously all I knew was that I wanted a good guru. I did not know what I needed to do; how and by what means, to subdue the mind, such as *sadhana chatushtaya*\* (the prerequisites for initiation into Vedanta) and all the rest. What I did then, he and I first sat down, as soon he had returned with the book ‘Who am I?’, and by a quarter past two I had read it ten times over. Through reading it those ten times, by Bhagavan’s grace, through which I was able to understand all the ideas contained in the works of Vedanta, even those that cannot be [easily] understood, some kind of deep certainty arose in me. The time reached a quarter past two and permission was given for us to go inside and speak.

I and he, my husband, entered the hall. As soon as Bhagavan arrived, some people who were there said, “They have come from Madras. It seems they have something serious they want to say.” They were speaking from memory. Then what I did, I had a very strong sensation ... as soon as I saw Bhagavan ... I had a very strong sensation of my consciousness being overpowered. He too, very strongly, his consciousness... my husband’s consciousness ... was overpowered. He (my husband) spoke first, saying, “She

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\* *sadhana chatushtaya* are the four means of salvation in Hinduism: discrimination, non-attachment, the six virtues (tranquillity, training, withdrawal, forbearance, faith and focus) and the desire for liberation.

has no interest in the household; no desire to be involved in worldly affairs. She would like to be alone somewhere. From an early age she has been desperate to find a guru. [I don't know what to do],” he said. What I...Bhagavan was looking at me. That day under his gaze ... my ... whatever I wanted to ask, Bhagavan was the one who entered within [me] ...

“What is it?” he asked. As soon as Bhagavan asked, I said that I wanted *atma sakshatkara* (realisation of the Self). Even I have no idea how I came to ask that. ‘Is that so (*appadiya*)?’ he said. Bhagavan’s way of saying the word, *appadiya* would sound so beautiful. Whatever anybody asked, whoever it was, he would say, *appadiya*. It would be very sweet. No sooner had he said that – “Is that so? Take a seat,” – than it was half past two. Consequently, when we went in and sat down at a quarter past two, everything, those words themselves, whatever words I used and how, whatever questions, we had only just read them in the ‘Who am I’ book. Do we have the spiritual maturity to go and ask questions of such a great sage?

Bhagavan, very peacefully, with great compassion, looking at me as if giving initiation through his eyes and granting me freedom from fear (*abhaya*), said, “Is it so? Please sit.” When he said pleasantly, “Please sit down,” I sat down.

I remember nothing after seeing [Bhagavan]. My husband had to leave for Madras that same day. He (my husband) realised that I wouldn’t go and that he needed to put in place arrangements for me somewhere or other, because I said I was determined to stay there with Bhagavan. That afternoon he found a room somewhere, a small room, took me there left me, and went to tell Bhagavan. Saying he had taken me there and that’s where I was, he left, after taking me and settling me in Gothami Lakshmi [house].

All that time I gave up eating, because all that was problem. Staying alone somewhere ... I was just having milk to drink. It went on like that for several weeks, once in

the afternoon and once in the morning. After Bhagavan had spoken to me, what happened was, he (my husband) came in the evening and said to Bhagavan, “I am leaving now. I am leaving her and going. Now Bhagavan must take care of her.” [Bhagavan] replied, “Just so!” as if to say, “She must remain here.”

At half past three Bhagavan related an incident from [Yoga] *Vasishta*. (Padma relates Bhagavan’s account of what Dasaratha said:) “Rama has become very detached from worldly things. He keeps to himself; he is always sitting alone; he does not take part in games; he has no companions, and no interest in or desire for anything. That’s how he is.” With these words, Dasaratha burst into tears. When [The sage] Vasishta came and straightaway asked where Rama was, [Dasaratha said,] “Rama doesn’t get involved with anything. He remains very alone. He no longer associates with anyone,” he said. “That’s what he has become, the child I was at pains to sire.”

So saying, Dasaratha wept. However, the newly arrived Vasishta, was delighted and said, “Is it so? Such is the level of spiritual maturity Rama has attained. I must go and see him at once.” Guru Vasishta was happy. [Yet as for] Dasaratha, [he] was weeping. While [Bhagavan] was relating that incident, some lady who was there that day, along with a few other people, asked me what I had asked. But I didn’t know what to say to her. When the devotees who were present asked me what I had asked Bhagavan at a quarter past two, [I could not say because] it was something I had never even thought before, never mind spoken. The reason why is that it did not belong to me. It was Bhagavan who inspired me to ask that question. Otherwise I would probably have asked for something different, like ‘peace of mind’.

When I decided [what to ask for], what I asked for was *atma sakshatkara*. If I am to say how it was when Bhagavan said these words, he (my husband), was weeping. I was happy, at peace. Then Bhagavan spoke. “Is that so? Please sit...,” he said. When I think about it, it was extremely appropriate to



that situation, the way Bhagavan told this story. A lady also who was there said, “He told the story for your sake.” She [also] said, “He [Bhagavan] willed that you should come and stay here, young as you are, and then, for that same reason, he told that divine tale [to] everyone. After that, day after day...” [video breaks off here in mid-sentence].

## **Part II**

To what extent grace can be gained, to what extent it must save (meaning and context not clear), he (my husband) came once a month to see me. He provided me with what I needed. As for Bhagavan, he, Bhagavan, noticed his visits. He knew about it. When I was within sight of him [Bhagavan], when I fell under his gaze, he would fix that gaze upon [me] for a short while. All that was a great experience, to be removing all the mind’s impurities from day to day.

Speaking of food, on one occasion, during the time I wasn’t taking food...very.....one day [I thought], “Till now I have not brought anything, anything at all for Bhagavan; I haven’t obtained anything for him.” What to give to Bhagavan? What is there that, if I give it to him, he will eat? If Bhagavan ate, he would only eat if the food was served to all. Such was his egalitarian nature. I thought about how I could ask Bhagavan and what I might give him. I asked everyone; all who were in the kitchen, I asked them.”

They replied, “What could you do, young lady? You yourself are not taking food. What are you going to prepare to give to him? It’s not important. What would it achieve? Your devotion is enough.” I could not accept that answer. What I did later was that I asked what he would eat at one, or half past one, in the afternoon.

They said that in the hot season, summer time, he would eat Palmyra fruits...But to manage to get 100 of them somewhere or other...I had no knowledge of the place, nothing to help me. I was determined to offer some kind of food to Bhagavan, so I spoke to someone, somewhere,

somehow, made the arrangements and bought a 100 [fruits], at which point, what they all said was, “If you bring them and hand them over at two o’clock, we’ll get them peeled and give them to Bhagavan.” I don’t recall how I got them for Bhagavan to eat, nor do I remember who brought them. I don’t recall how I managed to get that many palm fruits. Nor did I get help from anyone else.

They arrived somehow. (Padma uses her tone of voice here to indicate the idea of “somehow or other”). The sun was really hot. I took them to the kitchen, to the rear entrance at the back, handed them over and came away, having asked them to give them to Bhagavan. Afterwards, at half past two, we went for darshan, as was the usual practice. Later on, after 6.30 p.m., ladies were not allowed to remain [in the hall], they used to say. So what he [Bhagavan] did – Satyananda Swami was there – he said to him, whilst I was performing *namaskaram*, “Bring the dish from inside.” By “the dish from inside” I thought he probably meant ‘that (Padma points with her finger) dish from inside.’ I thought, ‘Presumably he means the one in the kitchen.’

He takes the dish with the palm fruits and comes and places it at the foot of the sofa. Accepting it, he says to Satyananda Swami, “Tell [her what] I said.” He (Bhagavan) is very near [to Satyananda Swami] and speaks in a very low voice. What he [Satyananda Swami] did then was, [he said], “You should not have delivered the fruits and then come away in this manner, without eating.”... [unclear]... It seems that, just after I had given the palm fruits in the kitchen, Bhagavan went in and asked, “Who has brought the nungu?”... [unclear] ...When Bhagavan asked, [they said], “The not-eating Padma.”

There were two people called Padma. One was an elderly lady and I [was the other]. Bhagavan apparently asked, “Who is the one who came just now?” “She is called “the Padma who does not eat”. “She just drinks milk,” [they said]. Then he took that vessel and placed it, brought it and placed it,

beneath this sofa. At six thirty, when I performed *namaskaram* and stood up, Bhagavan looked [at me].

“Bring it out,” he said. Satyananda took the dish and came next to me. Bhagavan was there, seated. What he did was, [he said], “Just as Bhagavan does not wish devotees to eat when he, the guru, is not eating, equally, if the devotees do not eat, then Bhagavan will not consent [to eat]. From now on you must eat.”

“Furthermore, there is a sloka in the [*Bhagavad*] *Gita*: “hunger, starvation... is not appropriate for the spiritual aspirant, the practitioners of both yoga and meditation. Neither is it acceptable for them to eat till the stomach is full. There should be neither overindulgence in sleep, nor deprivation of it.”

Having spoken thus, having said those words and said that they came from that sloka, he gave me that *yanai mandai* [earthen] vessel, the big *yanai mandai* as it was always called at that time, which he held in his hands. Giving it to me, he told me to eat.

“Tell her that Bhagavan will be pleased if she eats.” That’s what he [Bhagavan] told him [Satyananda Swami] to say. After that, that fast was automatically brought to an end, by his very presence, when I looked at him, by the very words from his mouth.

At the same time, the puja [was going on] in the Matrubhuteswara temple. It was as if I were receiving *anna prashana*, when swami suddenly said – I don’t know why but Niranjanananda Swami was very fond of me – “Tomorrow you really must start eating. This is Bhagavan’s will. It was Bhagavan’s intention [*uddesam*],” he said. “Very well, Swami,” I said. That day I sat down and ate a little boiled rice. As soon as I put it in my mouth – because over many days it (Padma points to her throat) had shrunk – I got a bad attack of the hiccups.

Niranjanananda Swami was very worried. “Just a little, enough, whatever you eat is enough. Let’s see tomorrow,” he

said asking for water to be given to me (and a lady who was there gave me some). “Never mind. You can start eating from tomorrow.” He then said, “Afterwards, from then on, little by little you will automatically begin to eat more, as Bhagavan requests.”

## 71. The Crest-Jewel of Sri Bhagavan’s Teachings\*

*Michael gives the following translation of the first mangalam verse of Ulladu Narpadu:*

*Other than ulladu [‘that which is’ or being], is there consciousness of being? Since [this] being-essence [this existing substance or reality which is] is in [our] heart devoid of [all] thought, how to [or who can] think of [or meditate upon this] being-essence, which is called ‘heart’? Being in [our] heart as [we truly] are [that is, as our thought-free non-dual consciousness of being, ‘I am’] alone is meditating [upon our being]. Know [this truth by experiencing it].*

In the first of the two verses of his *payiram* or preface to *Ulladu Narpadu*, Sri Muruganar writes that Sri Ramana joyfully composed this clear and authoritative text in response to his request, “So that we may be saved, [graciously] reveal to us the nature of reality and the means to attain [join, reach, experience or be united with] it”. Accordingly, in this first *mangalam* verse Sri Ramana reveals to us both the essential nature of reality and the means by which we can experience it, which is possible only by our being one with it. In the first two sentences of this verse Sri Ramana reveals several crucial truths about the nature of the one absolute reality, which is

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\* Michael James, *Mountain Path*, October 2007.

*ulladu* or ‘that which is’. Firstly he explains that it is not only being but also consciousness, because other than ‘that which is’ there cannot be any consciousness to know ‘that which is’. Therefore ‘that which [really] is’ is self-conscious – that is, it is absolutely non-dual self-conscious being.

Secondly he says that that truly existing reality or ‘being-essence’ exists devoid of thoughts, or devoid of thinking. That is, it is not a mere thought or mental conception, but is the fundamental reality that underlies and supports the seeming existence of our thinking mind and all its thoughts. However, though it supports the imaginary appearance of thoughts, in reality it is devoid of thoughts, and hence devoid of the thinking consciousness that we call our ‘mind’, because both this thinking mind and its thoughts are unreal. In the clear view of the one self-conscious reality, thoughts do not exist, because they appear to exist only in the distorted view of our mind, which is itself one among the thoughts that it imagines and knows.

Thirdly he says that it exists ‘in Heart’, that is, in the innermost core of our being. In other words, it is not merely something that exists outside us or separate from us, but is that which exists within us as our own essential reality. He also adds that it is called ‘Heart’, thereby indicating that the word ‘Heart’ does not merely denote the abode in which the reality exists, but more truly denotes the reality itself. Moreover, since the word *ullam* means not only ‘Heart’ but also ‘am’, by saying that the truly existing reality or ‘being-essence’ is called *ullam* Sri Ramana reveals that it is not something that exists as an object but is our own Self – our essential being or ‘am’-ness.

In other words, the absolute reality exists not only in us but also as us. It is the real ‘heart’ or core of our being. That is, it is our own very essence, substance or reality. It is that which we really are. Other than as the one absolute reality, we truly do not exist.

Because we mistake ourself to be this thinking mind or object knowing consciousness, the one fundamental reality is said to exist within us, but this is only a relative truth – a truth that is only true relative to the distorted perspective of our mind, which experiences dualities such as subject and object, ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, and so on. Since the one fundamental reality transcends all such dualities, the absolute truth about its nature is not merely that it exists within us, but that it exists as us.

Finally, by asking, “*ulla-porul ullal evan?*”, which means ‘how to [or who can] meditate [upon this] being-essence?’, Sri Ramana emphasises the truth that since the absolute reality is that which transcends thought, it cannot be conceived by mind or reached by thought. Therefore, since its nature is such, what is the means by which we can ‘reach’ it, ‘attain’ it or experience it as it really is?

Since it is not only that which is completely devoid of thought, but is also that which is essentially self-conscious, and since it is our own ‘Heart’ or essential being, the only way we can experience it is by just being it. In other words, the only means by which we can ‘attain’ this one non-dual absolute reality is by simply remaining as we always truly are – that is, as our own true, essential, thought free, self-conscious being. Therefore, in the third sentence of this verse Sri Ramana says, “Being in [our] Heart as it is alone is meditating [upon this truly existing reality, which is called ‘Heart’]”, thereby declaring emphatically that this practice of ‘being as we are’ is the only means by which we can experience the absolute reality as it is.

Thus in this first *mangalam* verse Sri Ramana succinctly reveals both the essential nature of reality and the means by which we can ‘reach’ it, ‘attain’ it or experience it as it really is. Hence in a nutshell this verse expresses the very essence of *Ulladu Narpadu*, and all the other forty-one verses of this profound text are a richly elaborated explanation of the

fundamental truths that he expressed so briefly yet so clearly and powerfully in this first verse.

Indeed, since it reveals so clearly not only the nature of the one absolute reality but also the only means by which we can actually experience it, this verse summarises the essence not only of *Ulladu Narpadu* but of the entire teachings of Sri Ramana. Therefore, it is truly the *chudamani* or crest-jewel of his teachings, and if we are able to understand its full import correctly, comprehensively and clearly, we have truly understood the very essence of his teachings.

As in all his other teachings, in this verse Sri Ramana explains to us the nature of reality for a single purpose, namely to direct our mind towards the one practice that will actually enable us to experience reality as it truly is. Unless we understand the real nature of our goal, we will not be able to understand why the only one path by which we can ‘reach’ that goal is to practise just being as we always really are.

If our goal were something other than ourself, there would be some distance for us to travel in order to reach it. But since we ourself are the goal that we seek, there is absolutely no distance between us and it, and hence the path by which we can reach it cannot be essentially any different from it. That is, between us and our goal, which is our own real Self, there is truly no space to accommodate any path that is other than our goal. Hence our path and our goal must be one in their essential nature. Since our goal is just thought-free self-conscious being, our path must likewise be just thought-free self-conscious being. This is the essential truth that Sri Ramana reveals so clearly in this verse, and that he reiterates in so many different words throughout his other teachings.

In our natural state of absolutely non-dual self-knowledge, which is our goal, our experience of our thought-free self-conscious being is effortless, because it is what we always really are. However, in our present state, in which we imagine ourself to be this thinking mind, we appear to be not devoid

of thought, as in truth we are, and hence we feel that we have to make effort to experience our thought-free self-conscious being. Thus the only difference between our path and our goal is the effort that now seems to be necessary in order for us to abide in our natural state of thought-free self-conscious being.

In this path, the effort that we have to make is not actually an effort to be, because we always effortlessly are, but is an effort to avoid mistaking ourself to be this thinking mind. So long as we imagine ourself to be this mind, we do not experience ourself as the true thought-free self-consciousness that is our real nature. Therefore, in order to avoid mistaking ourself to be this thinking mind, we have to make effort to focus our entire attention upon our essential self-conscious being, ‘I am’, thereby withdrawing it from all thoughts.

This state in which we focus our entire attention upon our own self-conscious being, thereby excluding all thoughts, is the true state of ‘meditation’, which Sri Ramana describes in this verse as *ullatte ullapadi ullade* or ‘only being in heart as it is [or as we are]’. That is, since the true nature of our essential self or ‘Heart’ is just thought-free self-conscious being, ‘being in heart as it is’ is just the state of abiding calmly and peacefully in our own essential self as our own essential self – that is, free of all thoughts as our own true non-dual self-conscious being, ‘I am’.

Thus the only path by which we can ‘reach’ or ‘attain’ our own essential self, which is the one and only absolute reality, is this simple practice of keenly attentive self-consciousness – self-consciousness that is so keenly attentive that it gives absolutely no room for the rising of any thought. Since no thought can rise unless we attend to it, when we focus our entire attention upon our own essential self-consciousness, ‘I am’, we automatically exclude the possibility of any thought arising.

That is, thoughts arise only because we think them, and this act of thinking involves an imaginary diverting of our



attention away from our essential self-consciousness, ‘I am’. Therefore, the only effective means by which we can remain completely free of all thoughts – and hence completely free of our mind, which can rise and appear to exist only by thinking – is by just being attentively, keenly and vigilantly self-conscious.

This state of thought-free and therefore mind-free self-conscious being alone is the state that Sri Ramana describes as ‘being as we are’, and it is not only our path but also our goal. When we practise this vigilantly attentive and therefore thought-excluding self-consciousness with effort, it is the path, and when we experience it effortlessly as our unavoidable natural state, it is our goal, which is the absolutely nondual state of true Self-knowledge.

## **72. How I Came to the Maharshi\***

People may say: You cannot have known Bhagavan; He lived in India and you in France. That is true – and yet I have known Bhagavan and He has protected me. Bhagavan is the Self – and for the Self, time and space do not exist.

It all began one afternoon in 1942 when Camille Rao, one of His fervent devotees, came to see us in Nice. Because of the war, Camille, a French lady married to a Hindu, was unable to return to India after a visit to her family in France. Italian and German troops were everywhere in the country bringing anguish and famine in their wake.

And there, for the first time, I heard of the existence of the Saint of Arunachala. Camille made me positively see the Ashram, the coconut palms, the fiery mountain; with her I enter the large hall where He is seated on a couch, giving darshan to the visitors. Incense sticks are lit; a light burns near Him. I feel His Presence, His so intensely kind and

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\* Jean Clausse, *The Mountain Path*, October 1972.

loving look, His gracious smile. Camille Rao is no more than a voice in the dark – and then the voice also is silent and Bhagavan is there, more real than in His material form. All troubles seem to dissolve, the very consciousness of “I” is absorbed by this powerful Presence and a wonderful feeling of bliss overwhelms us.

“Now, you know Ramana Maharshi. He will help you as he helps me,” were Camille Rao’s parting words.

Did she know how true the prophecy would be?

Sometime later I was compelled by the military authorities of occupation to work in their office as interpreter since I knew German. This enabled me to save some lives. Later the Communists who ruled the town after the departure of the Germans arrested me. But as the prison was already full up, I was put in an old disused ammunition storeroom together with thirty other men. There was no window, no light, no latrine – and only the cold concrete floor to sleep on. Out of the dark came a friendly voice: “My poor friend, if they have brought you here, you must be prepared for a prolonged stay, eight or ten weeks at least.”

I seemed to recognise the voice. “Excuse me, are you not...?”

“Yes, I was the ‘Chief of Cabinet’ of the last Prefect and we often saw each other at the Franco-German Labour Commission. By the way you are in good company here: a colonel, two doctors, a notary, a chief accountant; all good French citizens, – only the place lacks a little comfort!”

Well, after two days of this nightmare, my wife contrived to see me for a few minutes. She brought me a blanket, a candle, matches and – a photo of Ramana Maharshi. A look at His eyes, His face, transformed everything. I was out of space, out of time with Him who had transcended the world. Darkness, the fetid atmosphere, the prison walls lost their reality. When everybody was asleep Silence spoke to me of Joy and Freedom – and Joy was in my heart.

“Jean Clause! Jean Clause!” My neighbor shakes me.

“You are being called outside – hurry up!”

The door opens, a ray of sun enters the den, the guard makes impatient gestures. I am pushed out. Half-blinded by the sudden light, I reel as if drunk.

“Come along!” shouts the guard.

A thought goes through my mind: Is it for the execution wall? But generally this kind of walk takes place at dawn.

“Where are you taking me?”

“We execute orders.”

“What orders?”

“Superior orders.”

And so miraculously I found myself without any apparent reason in a comfortable hospital bed with white linen, pure air, a smiling nurse – really it was paradise!

I had accepted the ordeal – through the Maharshi. I had gone further – it had become useless – and so it came to an end.

Later on, in the course of the five months I spent in custody at the hospital in the wing reserved for sick and privileged political prisoners, I had several other proofs of the effective protection of Bhagavan.

Once, for instance, there was panic among the prisoners because the floor just below was in flames. We were locked up and the warders had gone to help. Each one of us saw himself already burnt alive. I felt inwardly absolutely quiet, taking refuge at the feet of Bhagavan – and instead of death – the firemen arrived!

At another time, we all expected to be shot by the Communist soldiers who had sent an ultimatum to the Prefect. Nobody slept that night and in all the eyes there was abject fear. So strong is the love of this little ego, – so thick, the veil of Maya! – But Ramana Maharshi made me see beyond – and all was well!

### 73. More than a Dream\*

“Is there any significance in a dream or is it a mere phenomenon?” was the question I put to Sri Bhagavan in writing. In those times, the subjects of ‘guru and *sishtya*,’ of ‘initiation and *diksha*’ were the foremost topics of general discussion. Does Sri Bhagavan give *diksha* to us and if not, why not? In the earlier days, the presence of Bhagavan was sought, above all, by people who desired liberation. Our ambitious aspirations saw no bounds in the grace of his presence. My intense feeling was, that whether there was significance or not in all these *dikshas* and initiations, if Sri Bhagavan was to give me initiation, it would be a blessing for me in any case. His pithy utterances were very cryptic, ever pregnant with meaning and power: “Who is the Guru? Who is the *sishtya*? Who is to give and to whom? What is there to give? You think the ‘Self’ to be the body and take yet another body for the ‘Guru’ and demand the one to bless the other. Is the ‘Guru’ regarding the body as the ‘Self’? There is neither Guru nor disciple other than the ‘Self’. Guru is Self.”

Though convinced by his presence and utterances, there yet remained a lurking sense of something missing and unfulfilled. It was at that time that I had an extraordinary experience which left an impress on my whole being. It was neither a dream nor a waking state experience. I was perfectly alive to it and aware of its permeating nature, which consumed and overpowered me. After the experience, I immediately wrote the following in a notebook and later went to the Ashram. Reaching Sri Bhagavan’s presence before dusk, I left my notebook with him for his perusal. This was the record:

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\* T. P. Ramachandra Iyer (T.P.R.), *The Mountain Path*, July 1969.

*18th November 1939, 3:00 a.m.*

It was an apparent dream. I was in a huge quadrangle of some college buildings. I was studying when I suddenly saw that Sri Bhagavan had come down, youthful and vigorous in appearance, and had the impression that he was going to manifest himself and speak. Oh, it was a wonderful sight. Thousands of people gathered round at a distance encircling Bhagavan, perched on all walls, upper floors and any available space around. I saw Dandapani sitting at a distance echoing Sri Bhagavan's speech which was in turn echoed by another. It had never occurred to me that this would happen or that Sri Bhagavan would ever come here, and I, who was at a distance could not stand any separation. I darted towards Sri Bhagavan and embraced him with so firm a grip, the like of which, I have not the strength to do or achieve in physical consciousness. And Sri Bhagavan embraced me. In each other's embrace, we left the place. At once I found him in my house. First welcoming Sri Bhagavan was my mother, more robust than she ever was in life. Then my father, calm and unperturbed as he always was, followed by my sister. Sri Bhagavan had a cold bath, myself pouring pots of water over him. Then in a few moments he went up and down our house throwing us all in confusion, but I alone followed him without a second thought. By this time, my mother appeared to be losing her confidence and faith. In the midst of this embarrassment, and in her presence, Sri Bhagavan appeared to put me to the test, as it were, and asked me, pointing to my sacred thread and other things: "What is all this! Now I say, throw, throw them away and I shall give you this." He was holding in his hands a bunch of *darba* (kusa grass) and I did not perceive how it came into his hands. At first, I hesitated for a moment to discard my sacred thread for kusa grass, but a moment's reflection made me surrender to his will and with all vehemence I tore off the sacred thread and flung it on the ground, to the dismay of my mother and perplexity of my

father. Immediately, Sri Bhagavan gave me two handfuls of *kusa* grass in a ‘horseshoe’ shape, and the moment I touched and received them, a great serenity pervaded my entire being. Just then I experienced a descent of dynamic force into my being, flowing as it were, from and through the *sahasrara*, permeating downwards slowly to the heart-centre, at which moment I felt apprehensive that my physical frame could not withstand this permeation and impact any more without jeopardy. With courage and determination, I looked up at Sri Bhagavan to ask him what all this was about. There was no answer, but I saw Sri Bhagavan’s form change into the shape of Sri Rama and tell me something that I could not catch. So I asked, “Who are you?” and the reply was “I am Sri Rama, Sri Rama,” whereupon this vision disappeared and I saw Sri Bhagavan in its place. My mother began to cry aloud, having lost her balance of mind by this time, and said, “I will die, I will die, thinking I fell a prey to Sri Bhagavan’s lures.” The mention of death caused irrepressible laughter in me, and Sri Bhagavan said at once, “Yes, die; you should die.” When Sri Bhagavan said so, I turned around to my mother and with ferocity cried out, “Yes, die! die!” She was rolling on the ground when Sri Bhagavan asked me, “What is the earliest train to Bombay and the cheapest route?” He said he had to go there and to one or two more places, and then go on a tour in the north. I was thinking how best to take Sri Bhagavan and go with him when I felt completely awake and began reflecting on the event. Did it have any significance or was it merely a dream phenomenon?

As usual, the following morning I entered the Old Hall. Sri Bhagavan’s welcome nod and penetrating look overwhelmed me, and even as I was halfway through doing my obeisance he turned to the shelf beside him, took out the notebook and handed it to me. Immediately he began, “Don’t you know what Madhavan did? One day he was massaging my limbs. Leaving him to his job I reclined, closing my eyes. After some time, I felt some variation in the friction, so I opened

my eyes and saw him with his head bent down clutching my feet in his hands. I asked, ‘What are you doing?’ ‘Nothing,’ he replied, resuming his task. He took it as *diksha* by the feet.” Immediately I said that I had had an unusual experience by Sri Bhagavan’s touch, which stirred my being, though in a dreamy condition, and asked if initiation or *diksha* could be had in this way also and whether these were real and effective regardless of the *swapna* (dream) state? Sri Bhagavan slowly spoke, interspersed with short intervals of silent gaze: “*Jagrat* and *swapna* are states that come and go. If these states are real, they must be unchanging, permanent.

“Our real nature is constant being. It never changes. Be it *upadesa* or *diksha*, the efficacy of the Guru’s influence or God’s grace is not conditioned by the different states. The influence is an experience of being itself. Guru, God and Self are one and the same. So long as the Guru, God or the Self are deemed external, all *upadesa*, initiation and the several *dikshas* mentioned have a relative meaning and significance. But ‘Guru’ is external and internal and is the very Self. Such influence is efficacious whether the experience is in the *jagrat* or *swapna* states.”

## 74. How I came to Bhagavan\*

I had never read anything about Ramana Maharshi, I had not read much of anything at all. I had hardly ever heard the name. I was not a seeker. I was five years old and I came because my parents decided it was what they wanted to do and at five one doesn’t have a voice when it comes to decisions like where to live.

Memory is a curious attribute. Many things are bright and clear throughout the river of life, while others blur and fade or else change emphasis as well as shape and form and seem

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\* Katya Osborne, *The Mountain Path*, Jan-Mar, 2003.

to evolve into something different. My memories of arriving in India are fractured and mainly unclear, but my memories of arriving in Tiruvannamalai are surprisingly coherent. It was hot, that I can clearly state, and it was also incredibly dusty. Why the dust should have made such an impression on me I now find hard to understand but in my mind's eye there is a soft pall of pale gold dust over everything. It was in the air and on the road. After dark the dust was cool and welcoming to the feet like puffs of talcum powder. Although the place was new and strange, I never associate a feeling of strangeness with Tiruvannamalai. Perhaps because it was such a short time before it became familiar as home. In the way of children my brother and sister and I rapidly learnt the language and made friends with other children. It cannot have been quite as quick as my memory recalls because my brother Adam was barely walking when we arrived and my sister Frania was a babe in arms. Our friends were the gardener's daughter and the children of the Ashram: Sundaram, who is now the president, Ganesh and Mani, as well as their sisters. But all that happened later.

The first time I saw Bhagavan is as clear today as it was at the time, all those many years ago. It must have been the day after we arrived. My father was not with us as he had been interned in a concentration camp in Bangkok where we had lived previously. With us three small children clustered around her, my mother went to the Ashram for the first time to receive Bhagavan's darshan. As the oldest I was in charge of the tray of fruit we were bringing. It had been explained to us that the only acceptable gift to Bhagavan was fruit, which could be shared in the dining hall later. The tray I bore, laden with bananas and oranges, felt huge. My arms were stretched around it and it threatened to wobble free and spill everything onto the ground. It took intense concentration to keep things from collapsing, but it was my responsibility and I took it seriously. We walked across the open space that was occupied by a few sleeping dogs, some squirrels and a peacock. (The



space is now a beautiful hall with a polished granite floor and a shrine at one end where Bhagavan is buried, but was then just bare ground inhabited by various animals waiting their turn to seek Bhagavan's darshan.) Then we entered the cool hall where he sat, known now as the Old Hall but in those days it was the only hall and the main entrance was a door opposite the couch. It is now a window.

We entered and saw Bhagavan straight away sitting on the couch in front of us. There he was. Seeing him, all the rest of the room and the people faded away. There was such a presence, and yet it didn't feel strange. He seemed luminous and magical and friendly all at once. I stood there staring at him, not knowing what to do with my burden of fruit. He smiled and pointed to a stool at the side of the couch that was used to receive such offerings. I didn't know that and since there was no guard-rail around him back in those days, I sat myself down on the stool with my back to Bhagavan and smiled happily at all the people in the hall who were smiling back at me. We were the first European children to come there and a definite novelty. I was still holding the tray. Bhagavan laughed and remarked in Tamil, which we didn't yet understand. It was translated to me. He had said that I was making an offering of myself. All the rest of my life when I have got myself into one sort of mess or another, that remark has given me the courage to go on.

After all, Bhagavan must surely help one who has made an offering of herself. The years of our childhood were spent running in and out of the hall. Frania learnt to walk there, Adam learnt to run and I learnt whatever it is one learns when playing at Bhagavan's feet, most of it probably by osmosis. It was there that we saw the animals come to visit him. The peacock would come through the door and right up to the couch, then the beautiful tail was spread and it would dance. Bhagavan watched – we all watched – as though it was a formal programme, and when it was over Bhagavan gravely acknowledged the peacock's performance and it left. The

squirrels came to the door and glanced around nervously, then there was a dash to the couch and up onto Bhagavan's hand or knee. He sometimes gave them puffed rice from a small tin kept for the purpose. Dogs came and prostrated themselves before the couch and monkeys chattered to him from outside the window. They were frequently chased away but as frequently reappeared. One time someone showed Bhagavan a paragraph in the newspaper where there was an announcement that vans were touring the villages and collecting monkeys for sale abroad for experiments. Bhagavan laughingly said to the king monkey who was clinging onto the bars of the window beside his couch:

“Did you hear that? It isn't safe for monkeys here right now so you better take your tribe away.” When the vans came there wasn't a monkey in sight. Not one in the whole ashram area. Later I heard someone comment that no monkeys had been caught in the whole of Tiruvannamalai. Then of course there was Lakshmi the cow. She would wait for Bhagavan outside the back door or call for him to come out and then she would snuggle up to him and rub her head against him, or else he would go and visit her in the cowshed and sit down beside her. They spoke together and it was obvious that she adored him. It was also obvious that she was a very special lady. I think that all the animals considered that he was one of them, albeit in a special way, and come to think of it the humans seemed to think more or less the same thing.

The amazing thing is not that all the animals came to Bhagavan, it is that we all accepted it and took it for granted without being amazed. Of course children believe in magic as a part of everyday life, but even the grown-ups accepted it as completely natural as far as I remember. Adam, Frania and I came to Bhagavan with our toys to show him, with our books and puzzles to share with him and with our secrets to confide in him. He treated us children with the same courtesy and gave us the same attention that he accorded to the adults with their problems. He also laughed with us. With the passage

of time, and the realisation that he was the great *Sadguru*, people forget in their reverence that Bhagavan had a great sense of humour and the hall often rang with his laughter.

Our lives revolved around Bhagavan and the Old Hall. We all played on the rocks of Arunachala and made ships or castles out of their shapes, but we gravitated back and until we were severally sent off to school, the hall was the focus of our lives.

Bhagavan sat in one corner with a small revolving bookcase beside him. He kept his favourite works there for easy reference and he often shared something from one of the shelves with someone who asked him for clarification, that is, if he didn't give his usual reply along the lines of: "First find out who is asking the question". He did however occasionally get involved in points of doctrine. I was in the hall when he was explaining about the spiritual heart on the right side of the body. This surprised me as I had naturally assumed, as children do, that the heart was on the right side of the body and couldn't comfortably imagine it anywhere else. Why would that be spoken of as something remarkable? I was in the hall when people sometimes came crying with inner pain. A look from him was often all it took to heal them. It was in the hall that I brought my new paper-folding book. I had received it for my birthday and one of the designs just would not work out. I tried it again in front of Bhagavan and of course this time it worked. I knew it would. People would show him their letters, sometimes from loved ones and sometimes with news such as job opportunities. We showed him everything, every part of our everyday lives.

I wrote to my mother from school and asked at the end of the letter to be remembered to Bhagavan. She showed him the letter and he said: "If Kitty will remember Bhagavan, then Bhagavan will remember Kitty." Another remark that has given me comfort over the years.

We all, humans and animals came to Bhagavan to show him our triumphs and our troubles and we knew he would deal

with it all and understand it all, often, in fact usually, without a word being spoken. The long part of the hall at Bhagavan's feet was where people sat as a rule, the men on the left and the women on the right with a natural passageway in between.

Some in silent meditation, some with something to say or to ask and waiting for the moment that seemed appropriate, and some just sitting there, luxuriating in Bhagavan's presence. Twice a day, morning and evening, the *pujaris* came and sat up near his couch and chanted the Vedas. First it was a few older men, and then after Chadwick inaugurated the Veda school, there was a leavening of young boys.

Although Bhagavan could be friendly and approachable, there were times, and usually one of them was when the Vedas were being chanted, when he would close his eyes and go away. To see him then was awe-inspiring. He looked exalted. At times like that one could hear a pin drop. No one even wanted to breathe too loud. It is strange to reflect on how many moods and faces Bhagavan could wear and belong to none of them. We children accepted it all without question. Bhagavan was Bhagavan and of course he could do anything and be anyone he chose – well naturally.

With peculiar elasticity, our time in Tiruvannamalai seemed to both pass in a flash and also to encompass our whole lives. It was barely a year from when I entered the hall for the first time till I was packed off to school, a development that seriously interfered with my education which was advancing very well indeed in the Ashram and on the Hill. My mother didn't agree with my arguments, so school it was. Every holiday back I came and Bhagavan was there, just the same as ever, and so we slipped seamlessly into our old lives. The Hill and the hall never changed and, as far as a child's eyes could judge, neither did Bhagavan. We didn't notice that his body was getting older. I wish now that I had spent more time sitting in the hall instead of climbing a tree with my book. Of course I thought that Bhagavan would be there for ever. Of course he is.

## 75. Namaskara\*

*“Prostration means ‘subsidence of the ego’. What is ‘subsidence’?”*

*To merge into the source of its origin.”*

– SRI BHAGAVAN

At about 3 o’ clock this afternoon a young boy, four or five years of age, came with his mother. She prostrated before Bhagavan and sat down. The boy prostrated likewise, but continued the salutations over and over again. Bhagavan laughed at that and told his attendants: “Just see. He is prostrating to me over and over again. Perhaps he thinks that if he does so, he may afterwards do whatever he pleases. He is a young lad. What does he know? He is just imitating his elders. He must however be rewarded. All that he wants is a plantain. If he gets it he will stop. Give him one.” On being given one, the boy went and sat down.

After some time, someone came and did *sashtanga namaskara* (reverential salutation by prostrating with all the eight limbs of the body touching the ground), but did not get up for a long time. People nearby finally made him get up. He somehow got up but began saluting again and again. He was ultimately prevailed upon to stop saluting and sit down. Bhagavan told the people near him: “*Namaskara* means prostrating a number of times according to some. What can be done? The real meaning of *Namaskara* is the dissolving of the mind.”

“What is the meaning of ‘*Sashtanga Namaskara*’, Bhagavan?” asked the devotee.

“It means that eight limbs of the body, namely, two hands, two legs, two arms, chest and forehead, touch the ground while saluting. The idea behind this type of obeisance is that the person doing it says, ‘the body which touches the earth, will

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\* ‘Leaves from a Devotee’s Diaries’, *The Mountain Path*, October 1987.

resolve itself into that earth ultimately, and the ‘I’ in me will continue to be ‘I’ alone’. That idea must be known to oneself by enquiry. Without knowing it, there is no use in doing these *namaskaras*. With meaningless *namaskaras* people want to secure all the benefits: ‘Swami must give them whatever they desire, be it a bag of clothes or money’. Whenever they do *namaskara*, I feel afraid. I must be beholden to them. I must act according to their wishes. I must fulfil all their desires. I must conduct myself carefully after knowing their minds. Not only that. Just by bowing to me, they get a sort of right over me. When people like us suffer like this; what about Iswara Himself? He must be beholden to ever so many; he must act according to the wishes of people; he must give boons to people. When *Swamitvam* itself has so many troubles, what about *Iswaratvam*? If anyone refrains from prostrating before me, I feel very happy because I need not be beholden to him. A *jnani* need not prostrate before anybody. Nor need he give his blessings to anybody. That is because his mind remains always submerged. He is deemed to be doing *namaskara* at all times. Some people feel offended when they prostrate before a *jnani* and he does not respond with another *namaskara* nor even raise his hand and bless them. But the fact is, before the others have prostrated, the *jnani* will have already prostrated lower, his mind having been dissolved. Even blessing (*asirvadam*) is similar. The submerging of the mind itself is a blessing. The *jnani*’s mind remains always submerged; That being so, who is the one to bless? What is it that is done?” said Bhagavan.

– from *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*  
by Suri Nagamma.

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“Some go on doing a number of *namaskaras*, e.g., that Janaki, she goes on striking her head down countless times along with *namaskaras*. She goes round a number of times. At each window she falls down and does a number of

*namaskaras*. However much I tell her, she won't leave off such practices", said Sri Bhagavan.

Somebody here interjected: "It seems she is known to Bhagavan since her childhood."

Sri Bhagavan said: "Yes, Yes," and continued: "There are others who come and fall before me while I am moving. They lie prostrate for some minutes. I cannot stand for them on account of my physical infirmity. So I walk on, telling myself: 'Only if we do *namaskaras* we will be benefited. After all, true *namaskara* is only the giving up the 'I'-sense, or killing the ego'."

– from *Day by Day with Bhagavan*  
by A. Devaraja Mudaliar.

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Sri Bhagavan often speaks of *namaskara* (prostration) in the following strain: "This *namaskara* was originally meant by the ancient sages to serve as a means of surrender to God. The act still prevails but not the spirit behind it. The doer of *namaskara* intends to deceive the object of worship by his act. It is mostly insincere and deceitful. It is meant to cover up innumerable sins. Can God be deceived? The man thinks that God accepts his *namaskara* and that he himself is free to continue his old life. They need not come to me. I am not pleased with these *namaskaras*. The people should keep their minds clean; instead of that they bend themselves or lie prostrate before me. I am not deceived by such acts."

– from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*

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Devotee: What is *namaskara* (prostration)?

MAHARSHI: Prostration means 'subsidence of the ego'. What is 'subsidence'? To merge into the source of its origin. God cannot be deceived by outward genuflexions, bowings and prostrations. He sees if the individuality is there or not.

– from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*

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As Sri Bhagavan was descending the Hill, one of the workers just outside the Ashram stopped work and was about to prostrate before the Master. Then the Master said “To engage in your duty is the true prostration.”

The Master’s attendant asked: “How?”

Master: “To perform one’s duty carefully is the greatest service to God. (Then, smiling, he entered the hall.)”

– from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*

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When I returned to the Ashram after spending some days at Kovilur *Mutt*, Sri Bhagavan asked me in detail about what I did, where I went and so on. I said: “Mahadeva Swami made kind enquiries about Sri Bhagavan and the *Ashramites*. The day I went there, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar and his relatives came to visit Mahadeva Swami.” Sri Bhagavan asked me what Chettiar did there. I said that he prostrated with great reverence before Mahadeva Swami and accepted *vibhuti* prasada from him. Sri Bhagavan asked: “Did you prostrate before Mahadeva Swami?” When I said no, he asked me why. I said: “I don’t want to do namaskar to anyone except Sri Bhagavan.” Sri Bhagavan said: “What an intelligent, wise fellow! Is your Bhagavan only within this body on the sofa? Is he not elsewhere? If a person is devoted wholly to one person, he should not go anywhere. If you go to another place, you must do what the people in that place do. Wherever and whenever you prostrate, you should think of your guru or your favourite god. If you do like this, your namaskar will reach the person you have in mind. That is the proper thing to do.” I realised my mistake. From then on I think of Sri Bhagavan whenever I do namaskar to anyone.

– from *Reminiscences* by Kunju Swami (unpublished).



## 76. Saranagathi Song\*

(Ragam: Navaroj – Composed by Manavasi  
V. Ramaswamy Iyer in 1914)

### English Transliteration

#### Pallavi

Saranagati Un Para Nān  
Inippugat Tuṇaidān Yēdu  
Nī Pugalāi... (Saranagati)

#### Anupallavi

Smaraṇāt Gadi Pala Aruṇāchala Niṛai Ramaṇā  
Karūṇā... Varuṇā... Sri Ramaṇā (Saranagati)

#### Charaṇam

Taruṇam Idu Vanrō Un Karuṇai Nōkkavē  
Kālaharaṇam Ākkiḍil Hā Hā Hā En Seyvēn  
Tunbai Nīkki Inbai Alikka En Anbā

Innam parāmugam Ennāl  
Tālādaiyyā Srī Vēdiyā... (Saranagati)

### Translation

#### Pallavi

I have surrendered unto Thee. Hereafter, is there need for  
me to seek any other refuge, you tell? (I Surrender)

#### Anupallavi

Sri Ramana, you are the fullness of Wisdom and the rain  
cloud of Compassion (dwelling) in Arunachala, who bestows  
Liberation on those who think of Him. (I Surrender)

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\* Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer, *Ramana Smriti*, 1980.

### Charanam

Is this not the appropriate moment for granting me your look of Grace?

If you delay, Oh! What can I do?

My beloved, remove my misery and grant me Supreme Happiness.

O Lord Supreme, I cannot bear your refusal to look at me any further... (I surrender)

## 77. How I Came to Bhagavan\*

I was born in Hungary into a warm, loving family. At the age of sixteen I lost my parents and my only sister in the Holocaust. I got married very young, and in 1949 we emigrated to Israel. My husband and I built a new life and a new family.

I began yoga training in 1969 with Swami Venkatesananda. I learned *hatha-yoga* and *raja-yoga*, the spiritual and philosophical part, along with meditation. I loved my teacher very much and he inspired me to become a yoga teacher myself. In the course of time, I left behind the physical part of yoga and concentrated only on the spiritual yogic approach to life with meditation and Self-enquiry.

### Dreams That Changed My Life

One beautiful summer afternoon in 1972 some remarkable things began to happen to me. It began with a dream that was unexpected and surprising. I was lying on the hot sand at the seashore, near Tel Aviv, with my husband and our two sons. I fell asleep and dreamt that I was an Indian boy walking down the street with my Indian mother. I asked her to send me to school, but she explained that we were poor and had no money for school. Suddenly my mother stopped and pointed

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\* Shoshi Shophrony, *Mountain Path*, April 2005.

at an old man walking in the opposite direction. She said to me, “Run my son, run to him, because he can teach you far more than you could ever learn in any school.” And so I did. I ran after the old man. Hearing my heavy breathing, the old man stopped, looked at me with a warm, loving glance and put his hand on my head.

And that was it! I woke up finding myself with my family beside the sea, with a very strange feeling about the experience. But as life’s rhythm is so very fast, as we swam, went home, prepared and ate lunch, and talked, the unusual dream began to fade somewhat.

After lunch I went to bed for a siesta and immediately fell asleep. Strangely, the whole dream appeared before me again, exactly as the first time; it was as if I were seeing the same cinema film twice. Now I became tremendously impressed, but hardly understood the dream and what it all meant.

That was the beginning. From that day on I continued to dream about the loving old man without any idea who he might be, and so I referred to him as my old uncle. The man, my old uncle, appeared in my dreams teaching, advising, sometimes reassuring or protecting.

He appeared and reappeared more often around the days of the Yom-Kippur War (October War, 1973, Middle East), at which time our elder son, Reuven, served in the army. He had been in great danger together with others, and we worried very much about him and everyone. The news on the radio was exciting and at times terrifying, but in my dreams my old uncle came, comforting and consoling me lovingly. I felt that he intended to protect not only me, but also our son, who was in danger. Indeed, how grateful we felt later on when we heard the story of his escape “by chance” from death.

There was another prominent dream with my old uncle related to my younger son, Rafy, who was sixteen years old at that time. Rafy asked for our permission to buy a small motorcycle. He worked during the summer and had earned the money for it. We didn’t give our permission, explaining

how dangerous it would be because of all the crazy drivers on the roads. We asked him to wait two more years, by which time he would be old enough, by Israeli law, to drive our car. Rafy, however, has a very strong will. When his heart is set on something he will not give it up easily. We, the parents, had a serious conflict with him. On the one hand, we knew very well how risky a motorcycle could be for a young boy, while on the other hand, we felt that our veto might be too much interference – that it was his life and not ours.

Once again, my old uncle appeared in my dream. The three of us, my uncle, Rafy (holding a motorcycle) and I, stood in the middle of a very busy street in Tel Aviv. My uncle asked me to wait at the side while both of them rode the motorbike in the heavy traffic. They began driving awfully fast and dangerously. I looked at them breathless, quite frightened. After a while they returned wearing broad smiles and my loving uncle said to me: “I took your son into very difficult situations. He is clever, skillful and cautious. You should allow him to buy the motorcycle. Trust him and don’t worry.”

When I woke up the next morning I was so happy and felt relieved of a difficult problem. I immediately turned to my husband, and said, “I approve, I approve of the motorcycle.” He was the only one whom I told about my dreams. My enthusiasm inspired and convinced him to also give his blessing concerning the motorcycle. I sincerely believe the dream helped me to remain calm and quiet each time Rafy came home late. Thank God, he never had any accidents.

### **Old Uncle Identified**

Nearly two years had passed since my first dream on the seashore. One day I visited a library in a yoga center. I stood in front of a bookshelf and randomly picked out one book. I opened it up and nearly fainted! My loving uncle’s beautiful face with a brilliant warm glance was staring at me from a picture on the first page. The name printed at the bottom of it

was Sri Ramana Maharshi. The book's name happened to be Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge, by Arthur Osborne. I began to read the first lines and found out that the "uncle" from my dreams is one of the greatest spiritual masters of the century!

I can't express in words my feelings at the moment of this new revelation. Suddenly a curtain was lifted from my eyes and a new kind of perception opened up in me. I felt an enormous thirst to learn each word of Bhagavan, to live thoroughly his teachings and to let them be absorbed in me. As the Direct Path was being revealed through these teachings, I never had any doubt and knew inside my heart that I had found my way, the purpose of life. I became indescribably grateful to Ramana Maharshi and to my fate.

Since then, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi has been holding me by the hand in day-to-day life and showing me the way to Self-realisation. His teaching is complete and perfect. His answers to devotees' questions are the most direct and effective, clearing every doubt or misunderstanding. There is never an unnecessary word, nor is there ever a missing one.

I must confess, that since I found my master and his teachings in many wonderful books, he appears very rarely in my dreams. But from the very first dream I was irresistibly drawn to him; I felt a natural love for Bhagavan. That is something beyond logic: how dreams, books and the radiating visage of my master could so greatly enrich my soul. Previously I had never experienced anything so enlightening; my devotion to Bhagavan is the most important happening in my inner life. I love my family very deeply and I am grateful for the good fortune of their company. Even so, no one can compare this sort of love to the tie which binds me to Bhagavan. That love is happening as if on another sphere. Deep inside me, it plays on like constant background music, as if I were living a double life. So anchored deep inside is he that I feel that there is no distance, nor ever could there be any distance, between Bhagavan and me. He is in my soul.

## Visit to the Ashram

It was a great surprise to me in the early 1970s to find out that Sri Ramanasramam had continued to grow, more than twenty years after Bhagavan's *Maha Samadhi*. I wrote to the editor of *The Mountain Path* and was happy to become a life subscriber, and also asked for a list of available books. As I got to know that the Ashram receives visitors, a great longing arose in me to see the places where my master lived.

I wanted to meditate in the Old Hall where his radiation vibrates in the air, to walk on the footpaths of Arunachala where he walked and which he so loved. I longed to be near to His Samadhi.

Unfortunately, I was unable to travel to Bhagavan's Ashram for many reasons, including family problems and others. The greatest hindrance was the anxiety of my husband. He feared for my safety. At that time there were no diplomatic relations between Israel and India. A fear for my life and security made the decision to undertake the travel more difficult. I didn't want to travel under these conditions and have my husband worry. I decided to wait until circumstances would come together to make it possible. It happened only after sixteen years of waiting and longing. My husband gave his blessing and let me go.

I arrived at the Ashram in December 1987, in the middle of the night, with a million stars shining in the sky. Immediately a strong feeling that 'I am home!' gripped me. In the first days, I was so overwhelmed that I couldn't stop shedding tears of happiness.

By that time, I had no more questions; I only needed to learn to strike down the restless mind and to remember to Be, only to Be! Bhagavan's love had brought me to Arunachala and his Grace continued to guide me to eternal Consciousness. The Ashram manager, Mani, received me very kindly, and I feel grateful to him.

My good fate brought me also to Lucy Ma (Lucy Cornelissen), an indweller devotee, with whom I had corresponded during the following two years until she left her body. Her letters were so wise, loving and instructive, that some parts of them were printed in *The Mountain Path*, in December 1991.

I visited the Ashram two more times, happily enjoying the warm radiant atmosphere of Bhagavan. These days, by Bhagavan's grace, I don't feel anymore the need to be there physically, as I feel Ramana Maharshi is with me always.

What have I received from him? Inner peace during the turmoils of life, and infinite love. What have I learned? A new angle of vision, understanding the truth of the underlying oneness and unity of existence and knowing the Self, the core Being of the whole universe. I owe you all this, dear Bhagavan. Thank you.

## 78. The Unity of Surrender and Self-Enquiry\*

One of Ramana Maharshi's most frequent comments was that there were only two reliable methods for attaining Self-Realisation; one could either pursue Self-enquiry or one could surrender. An almost equally common statement was that *jnana* and *bhakti* are ultimately the same. This second statement is usually interpreted to mean that whichever of the two paths one chooses to follow, the ultimate goal and the culminating experience will be the same. It is generally assumed that the two paths do not converge until the moment of Realisation is reached. However, if Ramana Maharshi's teachings are correctly interpreted, then it will be seen that the paths of surrender and Self-enquiry merge before Realisation, and that in the higher levels of practice, if one follows the

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\* Prof. K. Swaminathan, 'Editorial', *The Mountain Path*, January 1981.

path of surrender, then one's sadhana will be the same as that of someone who has chosen the path of Self-enquiry. This may seem very radical at first sight, but this is only because of the general misconceptions that many people have about Ramana's teachings on the true nature, meaning and practice of surrender. In order to eliminate these misconceptions, and to clarify Ramana's attitude and approach to surrender, it will be helpful to examine some of these commonly held ideas in the light of Ramana's statements on the subject, firstly to show how unfounded most of these ideas are, and secondly, by eliminating them, to illustrate the profundity of Ramana's real teachings.

The most convenient starting point for this enquiry is the relationship that exists between Ramana Maharshi, the Guru, and the thousands of people who call themselves his devotees. There is a long tradition in this country of people accepting certain teachers as their gurus, and then proclaiming immediately that they have surrendered to them. In most cases, this surrender is only a statement of intent, or at best, there is a partial surrendering to this new authority figure in the hope of acquiring some material or spiritual reward. Ramana's opposition to this type of religious bribery was quite clear, and it is best summed up in the following statement: "Surrender to Him and abide by His will whether he appears or vanishes; await His pleasure. If you ask Him to do as you please, it is not surrender but command to Him. You cannot have Him obey you and yet think that you have surrendered. He knows what is best and when and how to do it. Leave everything to Him; His is the burden, you no longer have any cares. All your cares are His. Such is surrender. This is bhakti." (Talk 450). This statement, typical of many that he made is a categorical refutation of the idea that one can surrender to one's God or Guru, and yet still demand that the God or Guru fulfils one's desires or solves one's problems. Despite this often repeated refutation, it is probably true to say that the majority of Ramana's devotees both believe



that they have surrendered to Ramana, yet at the same time, would not hesitate to approach him with their personal and material problems, especially if the perceived need required an urgent solution. In Ramana's teachings on surrender, there is no room for stray desires, and no room for expectations of miracles, no matter how desperate the situation might appear to be. Ramana says:

“If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance out of what may not please you.” (Talk 43).

Under Ramana's strict interpretation of absolute surrender, the only appeals which might qualify for approval are those where the devotee approaches the God or Guru with the attitude “This is your problem and not mine; please attend to it in any way you see fit.” This attitude bears the marks of partial surrender, for it fulfils the bare minimum requirements of Ramana's definition of true surrender. On this level of surrender, there is no longer any expectation of a particular solution, there is simply a willingness to accept whatever happens. It is interesting to note in this connection that although Ramana clearly stated that devotees who wanted their problems solved were not practising true surrender, he did admit that surrendering one's problems to God or to the Guru was a legitimate course of action for those who felt that they could not stick to His absolute teaching of complete surrender. He was once asked, “Is it proper that one prays to God when one is afflicted by worldly ills?” and his answer was “Undoubtedly.” (Talk 518). This admission that the Guru may be approached with personal problems should be seen as an extension of, and not a contradiction of his teachings on absolute and unconditional surrender. For those who are not ready for complete surrender, there is this intermediate practice of surrendering one's problems to the external “Higher Power.” It is not a dilution of his notion that surrender must be complete and total to be effective, it

is more an admission that for some devotees, such a massive step is impractical without some lesser intermediate stage.

If we can reach this point where we accept that we cannot ask Ramana to solve our problems and still claim that we have surrendered, then we move forward a few steps in our understanding of his teachings, but if we then try to put our new understanding into practice, we immediately encounter a new and apparently insoluble problem. The problem is that the desire to surrender is in itself a desire which we want fulfilled, and since, according to Ramana, true surrender cannot be accomplished without complete desirelessness, the presence of this desire in us is sufficient to prevent true surrender from taking place. It is the paradox of effort which is inherent in nearly all forms of sadhana. Simply stated, the problem is that there is a perception that there is an individual self which wants to extinguish itself so that the state of Realisation will be revealed, but anything which this individual self tries to do to eliminate itself merely prolongs its own existence. If one sees spiritual practice as something that one does to attain Realisation, then there is no solution to this problem; there is no solution because the whole problem stems from the totally false assumption that this individual self has a real existence. The first path along the path to true surrender is not to throw oneself at someone's feet and say "I surrender," it is the cultivation of the awareness and the understanding that there is no individual self to surrender, and that this individual self never at any time had, has, or will have any real existence. When Ramana said on several occasions: "Who is to surrender what and to whom?" (Talk 208), he was trying to drive home this fundamental point that without this understanding that there is no individual self, then all spiritual practices are done under false pretenses, and that meditation, surrender or self-enquiry done without this constant awareness are merely exercises in self-deception. The best illustration of this point that I have come across appears

in a recent publication called *The Secret of Arunachala*. In it, a devotee remarked to Ramana that a certain fellow devotee must be well advanced on the spiritual path because he meditated for eight to ten hours every day (Page 73). “Oh,” replied Ramana, “He meditates, he eats, he sleeps. But who is meditating, eating, sleeping? What advantage is there in meditating for ten hours a day if in the end that only has the result of establishing you a little more deeply in the conviction that it is you who are meditating?”

This aspect of Ramana’s teachings, that one is already realised here and now, is widely ignored when it comes to practice, but its importance cannot be overstated. Ramana has said: “The removal of ignorance is the aim of practice and not acquisition of Realisation.” (Talk 354). The most fundamental piece of ignorance is that there exists an individual self who is going to do sadhana, and that by doing sadhana, this individual self will disappear or be merged in some super-being. Until this concept is eliminated on the mental level, it is not an exaggeration to say that one is wasting one’s time in attempts to surrender or to enquire ‘Who am I?’ Correct attitude and correct understanding of this matter are of pre-eminent importance if the application of Ramana’s teaching is to be successful.

Returning now to the practice of surrender and bearing in mind the necessity of maintaining the right attitude with regard to the non-existence of the individual self, there remains the problem of how to surrender since the mere desire to surrender invents an illusory person who is going to surrender. The key to this problem and the key to all problems connected with the practice of Ramana’s teachings is to bypass the mind and move to the realm of being. One cannot truly surrender without escaping from that vast accumulation of ideas and desires we call the mind, and according to Ramana, one cannot escape or destroy the mind by any kind of mental activity. Ramana’s solution is to let the mind subside to the point where it disappears, and what remains when the

mind has subsided is the simple, pure being that was always there. In a conversation in *Talks*, Ramana gives the following illuminating answer. He says:

“It is enough that one surrenders oneself. Surrender is to give oneself up to the original cause of one’s being... One’s source is within oneself. Give yourself up to it. That means that you should seek the source and merge in it.” (Talk 208).

This is an immensely profound statement which not only sweeps away many of the myths that surround the practice of surrender, it also shows an indication that the route to the rediscovery of the Self is the same whether one chooses to label it “surrender” or “self-enquiry”. If we examine this statement closely, it is possible to extract three important conclusions regarding Ramana’s attitude and approach to surrender. Firstly, there is no external deity or manifestation to whom one must surrender; secondly, the source of one’s being is within us; and thirdly, and most importantly, true surrender is to go back to the original cause of one’s being and remain firmly and continually rooted there.

If this is translated into terms of practical advice, then surrender comes down to two words, being and stillness. In *Talks* Ramana says: “Your duty is to be, and not to be this or that. ‘I am that I am’ sums up the whole truth. The method is summed up in ‘Be still’.” (Talk 363). The stillness and the being of which Ramana speaks co-exist with each other and reveal themselves in their full radiance whenever interest in one’s thought stream dries up. Thus, for Ramana, the practice of surrender is to find within oneself this feeling of beingness and surrender oneself completely to it. On this level of surrender, practice consists of giving up wrong ideas by refusing to give them attention. Ramana’s statement that “The removal of ignorance is the aim of practice and not acquisition of Realisation.” (Talk 354) is extremely relevant in this connection, for it is only wrong ideas that separate us from a full awareness of our natural state. This final stage of surrender is simply a giving up of attachment to ignorance by

bypassing the mental processes which cause and perpetuate it. The practice is the fruit of the conviction that there is nothing to surrender, for by denying attention to the mental processes, one is finally surrendering the erroneous idea that there is an individual self to surrender.

When one attempts to practice this conviction by putting attention on the feeling of being that is within us, thoughts and desires will initially continue to flow at their normal rate, but if attention is maintained over a period of time, the density of thoughts decreases, and in the space between them, there emerges the clarity, the stillness and the peace of pure being. Occasionally this stillness and this peace will expand and intensify until a point is reached where no effort is needed to sustain the awareness of being, the attention merges imperceptibly with the being itself, and the occasional stray thoughts no longer have the power to distract.

When this point of surrender has been reached, all the ignorant misperceptions which constitute the illusory ego have disappeared, but this is not the final state of Realisation, because the misconceptions are only in suspension, and sooner or later, they will emerge again. Ramana has stated that the final, definitive elimination of ignorance is a matter for Self. He says that effort can only take one to a certain point, and then the Self takes over and takes one to the goal. In the case of surrender, the initial effort is the shifting of one's attention from the world of thoughts to the feeling of being. When there is no attention on it, the mind subsides revealing the being from which it came, then in some mysterious way, the Self eliminates the residual ignorance and Realisation dawns. Ramana summed it all up very neatly when he said: "Just keep quiet and Bhagavan will do the rest." (*Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 147).

This shifting of attention is the ultimate act of surrender. It is an acknowledgement that the mind, its concepts and desires are all ignorance, and that involvement in and attachment to the ignorance is all that prevents a full awareness of Reality.

It is an acknowledgement that nothing that is understood or believed is of any use; that no belief, theory, idea or mental activity will bring one any nearer to Realisation. It is an acknowledgement and a final acceptance of the idea that all striving and all notions of attainment are futile and illusory. This simple shifting of attention constitutes the culmination of surrender, because it is the final surrendering of the ignorant notion that there is an individual self to surrender. It is the final acceptance in practice of the conviction that there is only attachment to wrong ideas and that this attachment can be severed by refusing to give these ideas any attention. This final level of surrendering ignorance represents the full flowering of Ramana's teachings on surrender, and any less absolute interpretation merely entangles one in the meshes of the ignorant ideas he was striving so hard to eliminate. It is admitted that as a concession to weakness, he occasionally permitted and approved lower levels of surrender such as devotion and worship, but for those who could comprehend and practice his more absolute teachings, he would be satisfied with nothing less than the total unconditioned surrender which is implied in the practice of being and the detachment from ignorance.

Bearing this in mind, it will now be constructive to have a closer look at the practice of self-enquiry, and to focus attention on the large overlap that exists between enquiry and surrender. Ramana's advice on self-enquiry was clear, simple and direct, but like his advice on surrender, it has often been misunderstood and misrepresented.

The easiest way to avoid errors is to remember three simple but fundamental tenets of Ramana's teachings; firstly, that we are all Realised here and now, and that the only purpose of sadhana is to remove the idea that we are not; secondly, there is no individual self to extinguish, because the individual self never at any time existed; and thirdly, no amount of mental sadhana is helpful because the mind cannot do anything except extend the frontiers of its own ignorance.

If an awareness of these points is continually maintained, then the most obvious errors in practice can be avoided. One immediately sees that concentration on a point in the body is counter-productive because it involves mental effort. One can also eliminate the idea that self-enquiry is a mantra or an exercise in self-analysis because both of these approaches involve mental activity. On a subtler level, if one maintains an awareness that the individual self at no time ever exists, then one can avoid the dangerous but often deeply-rooted notion that self-enquiry involves one-self looking for another self.

To cut through the entanglements of these and similar misconceptions, and to find out what positive practical advice Ramana had to offer on self-enquiry, one cannot do better than go back to the words of Ramana himself. In Maharshi's Gospel he says that "The purpose of self-enquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source." (p. 48). The purpose of this focussing is the same as that which has just been outlined for the practice of surrender. According to Ramana, the mind is only a collection of ignorant ideas, and unless one steps completely outside this mental realm by keeping attention on the being from which the mind emerges, then the ignorance and the wrong ideas will inevitably continue. It is important to note that Ramana never explains self-enquiry as a practice by which an individual self is eliminated, he always phrases his advice to indicate that when one looks for the source of the mind or the ego, then both disappear, and it is discovered that neither of them ever existed. This stepping outside the mind is as crucial to an understanding of self-enquiry as it is to an understanding of surrender.

In a passage in *Talks* he says:

"The fact is that the mind is only a bundle of thoughts. How can you extinguish it by the thought of doing so or by a desire? Your thoughts and desires are part and parcel of the mind. The mind is simply fattened by new thoughts rising up. Therefore, it is foolish to attempt to kill the mind by means of

the mind. The only way to do it is to find its source and hold on to it.” (Talk 485).

This finding the source and holding on to it is the beginning, end and purpose of self-enquiry. The precise method is simple and well-known. When thoughts arise, one does not allow them to develop, one asks oneself the words, “To whom do these thoughts occur?” and the answer is “to me,” and then the question occurs, “then who am I? What is this thing in me which I keep calling ‘I’?” By doing this practice, one is shifting attention from the world of thoughts to the being from where the thought and the thinker first emerged. The transfer of attention is simply executed, because if one holds on to the feeling “I am” the initial thought of ‘I’ will gradually give way to a feeling of ‘I’, and then sooner or later, this feeling “I am” will merge into being itself, to a state where there is no longer either a thinker of the thought ‘I’, or a feeler of the feeling ‘I am’; there will only be being itself. This is the stage where attention to the feeling of “I am” has merged with the being from which it came, so that there is no longer the dualistic distinction of a person giving attention to the feeling of “I am”. There is only being and awareness of being.

If this practice is done persistently, then the verbal redirection of attention soon becomes redundant; as soon as there is the awareness of attachment to a particular thought, then attention is immediately switched back to the being from which the thoughts and the imaginary thinker came. It is important to stress that the verbal preliminaries of asking “Who am I?” or “To whom do these thoughts occur?” are simply tools to redirect the attention, the real self-enquiry begins with the subsequent witnessing of the disappearance of the thoughts, and the re-emergence of being as the mind subsides into temporary abeyance. Ramana summarised this very succinctly when he said in *Talks*: “*Abhyasa* (spiritual practice) consists of withdrawal into the Self every time you are disturbed by thought. It is not concentration or destruction



of the mind, but withdrawal into the Self.” (Talk 485). Since, in Ramana’s terminology the terms being and Self are virtually synonymous, what he is describing here is the practice of withdrawing into being and remaining there, undisturbed by the transient distractions of thoughts. This practice may be viewed from two perspectives. In the higher levels of surrender, maintaining awareness of being can be seen as a surrendering of wrong ideas, including the wrong idea that there is someone to surrender, whereas in self-enquiry, one reaches this same point of being by actively discarding thoughts, and by tracing back the feeling of ‘I am’ until it finally subsides into the being from which it came. Though the two descriptions might appear to be describing two completely different approaches, particularly in the preliminary stages, if the practices of surrender and enquiry are persistently and earnestly pursued, then the two approaches finally merge imperceptibly into the single practice of being. To surrender false ideas is simply to be, and that same state of being is the point where thoughts and the idea of a thinker disappear. This point, this state of being, is beautifully described in *Talks* when Ramana says:

“It is the state of perfect awareness and perfect stillness combined. It is the interval between two successive thoughts, and the source from which the thoughts spring... Go to the root of the thoughts and you reach the stillness of sleep. But you reach it in the full vigour of search, that is, with perfect awareness. (Talk 609).

This point which Ramana describes so graphically is the point of convergence between the path of self-enquiry and the path of surrender. The final, definitive detachment from ignorance has not yet happened, for this final elimination is a matter for the Self. Until that elimination takes place, one can only be, and once the awareness of being is maintained effortlessly, then the being of surrender in which one has given up all ideas, is the same being which results from witnessing the disappearance of the ‘I thought’. This state of being is still a stage of sadhana, for it lacks permanence, and the mind

is liable to reassert its dominance at any time. However, it is the final stage, and as such it is the purest and deepest level of both surrender and self-enquiry. It is a state which belongs neither to the world of ignorance nor to the Absolute Reality, but somehow, mysteriously, according to Ramana, it provides the link between the two.

When Ramana said on one occasion, “Do not meditate, be, do not think that you are, be,” (*Secret of Arunachala*, p. 73), he was summarising the whole of his practical teachings, because for Ramana, it is only in this state of effortless awareness of being that the final Realisation will be revealed.

## 79. Conversation with Sri Kunju Swamigal\*

When Kunju Swami was living in Palakkothu (near the Ashram), he was going to Skandasramam daily to take his bath in the springs there. On those occasions he used to adjust his return from Skandasramam after his bath in such a way that he would invariably meet Bhagavan on the Hill itself.

Once, Bhagavan asked him what he was doing while going to Skandasramam and coming back. Kunju Swami answered that he was chanting stotras, like *Aksharamanamalai*. Bhagavan approved of it and added, “Yes, when one is alone, either walking, sitting, etc., one should engage one’s mind in stotras or *japa*, to prevent the mind from getting distracted. As far as possible one should see that the mind is kept introverted, and for that stotras and *japa* are the best aids.”

Ever since, Kunju Swami has kept up the habit of chanting stotras or doing *japa*, while alone, especially while taking a walk.

Kunju Swami said, “Once, Bhagavan pointed to the Holy Hill, Arunachala, and said: ‘This is the storehouse of

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\* Darlene Delisi, *The Maharshi*, Jan-Feb 2013.

all spiritual Power. By going around it you benefit in all ways. Just as when you perform *japa* in Kasi, Varanasi, it is particularly beneficial; going around the Hill you get countless benefits thereby. It is called *sanchara samadhi*. While walking round the Hill the body is active but the mind is at rest at its source. The mind is then free from distractions. Through *sanchara samadhi* one easily gets *sahaja samadhi*. Hence our forefathers praised the value of pilgrimages; a pilgrimage (on foot) enables one to get established in *sanchara samadhi*.”

Sometime after he came here, Muruganar, one of the oldest devotees of Bhagavan, asked Bhagavan about the spiritual benefit of going around the Hill (*giripradakshina*). Bhagavan asked him to go round it first and then come to him. Muruganar followed his advice and told Bhagavan that he lost his *dehatma buddhi* (body-consciousness) after a while and regained it only after reaching Adi Annamalai. He reported to Bhagavan that the experience was unexpected and unique.

Bhagavan smiled and said, “Do you now understand?”

Once Kunju Swami asked Bhagavan, “If thoughts rise while doing *pradakshina*, what are we to do?” Bhagavan replied: “Just do nothing. Ignore them. Keep yourself away from them, as you automatically do when a donkey or dog crosses your path while walking round the Hill. If you ignore them they will go away of their own accord.”

Bhagavan also joked at that time “For you the problem is how to eradicate the thoughts; for us (meaning himself) the problem is how to bring forth thoughts, how to raise a thought!”

Ramakrishna Swami, who was known to Kunju Swami even from his boyhood, served Bhagavan fervently and faithfully. Once he wanted to live alone, away from Bhagavan, and hence with the permission of Bhagavan he went and stayed at Virupaksha Cave.

While there, he had the experience of seeing Chidambaram. He saw as in a movie, but clearly, the temple entrance and

then finally the interior and the sanctum sanctorum. Elated at this vision, he hurried to the Ashram to tell the other devotees and Bhagavan.

As he narrated the experience, Bhagavan was far from pleased, and said, “Was that what you went into solitude for?” His reprimand brought Ramakrishna Swami to his senses, and his elation disappeared and he became normal again.

Bhagavan never fully stretched Himself on the bed like anyone of us to sleep at night. It was a marvellous phenomenon which perhaps might not have been noticed by many. He used to have a few round pillows for his back to recline on, in which position he used to remain all night. Sometimes he used to support his head with his hand also, but always only in the reclining pose. We have never seen him sleeping on his back fully stretched out or lying down full on his side!

Bhagavan is the most natural person one can ever conceive of. He had a very subtle sense of humour; it never hurt anyone and was never aimed at anyone. He also appreciated others’ jokes, even those at his cost!

Once, a boy was seated in front of Bhagavan. Flies were troubling him and he was killing them. Seeing this Bhagavan told him: “Don’t kill them; it is wrong.” After some time, the boy looked at Bhagavan intensely and remarked: “You say killing is wrong. I was only killing little flies which were giving me trouble, but you have killed a big tiger and you are sitting on its skin. How can it be?” Bhagavan laughed and said, “Yes, what he says is quite right!”

The same boy had the habit of wasting food served on his leaf plate while seated with others. Once, Bhagavan told him that he should not leave anything on the plate when he finished eating. That day too the boy could not eat everything but stuffed something into his mouth and took out the empty leaf. Bhagavan saw him take out the empty leaf. However, the boy after throwing away the leaf also spat out the food that he had stuffed into his mouth. It was reported to Bhagavan. He enjoyed the trick of the boy and gave a hearty laugh.

Another boy who used to go around the Hill with Bhagavan and other devotees was always silent though others used to sing hymns and prayers and chants. (Bhagavan sometimes even used to hold this boy's shoulder while walking round the Hill.) One day Bhagavan, after every one of the party had sung some song or other, asked this boy why he alone did not sing. The boy's spontaneous reply made Bhagavan laugh to his heart's content. It was: "Do *jivanmuktas* ever sing?"

The author of *Sat Darshana Bhashya*, Kapali Sastriar, was very close to Bhagavan from his early youth, so much so he was one of the very few whom Bhagavan addressed intimately without prefixing or suffixing respectful terms. (Bhagavan was very particular in addressing all, even children, only with respect.) His parents were very keen to get him married and he himself was stoutly opposing it. They even approached Bhagavan to persuade him to marry. One day, Kapali Sastriar went near Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, tomorrow I intend taking up ashrama (stage in life)." Bhagavan, who knew his aversion to marriage and the anxiety of his parents, was surprised and said "Kapali, what are you saying? Have you taken the permission of your parents?"

Meekly he replied: "Yes, Bhagavan! I am going to enter into the second ashrama (meaning, marriage)!" Bhagavan laughed heartily and enjoyed the joke.

A young girl, named Rukmini, aged ten, the daughter of Vilacheri Ranga Iyer, used to meditate in front of Bhagavan, seated like a statue. Same-aged boys or girls sitting next to her used to tickle her to disturb her. Bhagavan used to watch all this in amusement. One day, after having had her bath, Rukmini sat for meditation, as usual in right earnest (like a yogi). A boy nearby (who had not had his bath yet) teased her, saying: "I am going to touch you." Rukmini firmly replied: "No one can touch me!" Bhagavan was looking at them. She turned to Bhagavan and then asked "Yes, none can touch me; they can touch only my body. How can anyone touch ME?"

Bhagavan expressed wonder and appreciation at the depth of her statement!

Bhagavan was always very considerate towards his devotees in all matters. It was the practice of Bhagavan's devotees to take his permission before proceeding to circumambulate the Hill and to prostrate before him on their return. Many came to the Ashram all the way from the town for this purpose even late in the evening and then proceeded immediately to their homes in the town. Bhagavan advised such devotees to break their circumambulation in town in the evening and to complete it on the following day when they came to the Ashram as usual.

When women devotees were ready to return to town at dusk he would always make certain that none of them went alone. If any of them found no company, he would ask someone to go with them and leave them at their house.

There were some devotees employed in Madras who used to come every weekend to Tiruvannamalai and return to Madras in time to go to their offices on Monday morning. Sometimes some of them were so reluctant to part from Bhagavan that they continued to overstay their time. They would go as far as the railway station only to return to the Ashram on some pretext or other. Bhagavan, therefore, in such cases used to send someone with them to the railway station to see that they actually got into the train and left for Madras. He did not like that anyone should neglect his duties!

When a devotee came late in the evening after everyone had taken his meal and gone to bed he was not allowed to go hungry on this account. Bhagavan always saw to it that some food was kept for such late-comers and that they had their meals. When such a visitor arrived Bhagavan simply looked at some of us. That was enough for us to take him to the dining hall and give him his meal!

Bhagavan never started to eat before all those who were present were served. The beggars waiting at the gate are even

now given their food before inmates and visitors are served. No exception is made to this rule even on crowded occasions like the *Jayanti* and the *Aradhana*. All these instances will show how considerate Bhagavan was to others!

## 80. The Unexpected Feast\*

One day two destitute-looking Brahmins entered the hall. It was known that they earned their livelihood by the wretched and socially demeaning occupation of bearing the dead to the cremation grounds. Both were extremely hungry after having discharged their duties.

Custom demands that anyone entering a house recently visited by death should take a bath immediately upon leaving. This stricture applies particularly if one steps into the cremation ground, and more particularly if one is involved in removing and physically transporting the departed to this place.

A heated argument had ensued between the two men about the propriety of coming to the Ashram to have a meal without having bathed. While one of them keenly felt the unseemliness of transgressing this hallowed custom, the other dismissed it as impracticable in view of their acute hunger. Assured of a meal in the Ashram, which was on their way home, they thought they might appease their appetite. They came to the hall and sat down. One of them excitedly and abruptly said to Bhagavan:

“Swami, I have been insisting on the customary bath before we sit for our meal. Is that not but just and proper?” Bhagavan responded in a very soft tone, “No one can say you are unjust.” The other at once, in a greedy agitated voice, burst forth:

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\* Smt. T.R. Kanakkammal, *Mountain Path*, April 2007.

“The pangs of hunger are so intense that our entrails are being devoured. Is it wrong to eat when hunger is so gnawing?”

Bhagavan quietly replied, “Who says it is wrong? Not at all.” Shocked, looking at one another, they asked in one voice, “But then who is wrong?”

Bhagavan answered:

“Don’t think you alone are pall-bearers. All of us are carrying these lifeless corpses. This body is a veritable corpse. Everybody carries it saying ‘I, I’. Whoever has the ‘I-am-the-body-feeling’ is but a pall-bearer. As long as one has not gone beyond this, one remains as impure and polluted as a pall-bearer. The pollution of bearing this dead body cannot be washed away by a dip in any tank. Bathing in the holy waters of the Atman alone can remove this pollution.”

The Brahmins, though initially feeling vindicated, were now startled and stared at each other. In an instant, the entire complexion of the issue stood transformed. Everyone without exception was equally polluted! All people shared their fate!

Rid of their social inferiority they felt lifted up. The felicity with which *atma bodha* – the eternal truth – was transmitted to them and others in the hall, and the *sama drishti* of Bhagavan, that knew no distinction between regular devotees and stray visitors, however socially unsavoury their vocation might be, left those seated in the hall astounded. That we are all bound to die is known to everyone. But even before we die, if we have not yet bathed in the waters of the Atman, we are already as though dead, bearing with us lifeless corpses lost in ‘I-am-the-body’ consciousness. This was a revelation for one and all gathered in the hall.

The next minute, the two Brahmins were nowhere to be seen. No one knew where they had gone, to the dining hall for food or elsewhere. But one thing was certain; for their spiritual hunger, Bhagavan’s words had been an unexpected feast.



The exalted and unique greatness of a realised guru is sung gloriously in *Guru Gita* (Chapter 1, verses 25 and 26) from *Skandapurana*:

kāśīkṣetram nivāsaśca jāhnavī caraṇodakam |  
gururviśveśvaraḥ sāṅśāttāraḥ brahm niścayaḥ || 25 ||

The place of residence of a guru is verily kashi *kshetra*. His *charanamruth* (water dripping off his feet) is verily the holy Ganges. He is verily Visweshwara, Taraka Brahman, the Saviour.

guroḥ pādāṅkitam yattu gayāste'kṣayovataḥ |  
tīrtharājaḥ prayāgo'sau gurumūrtiyai namo namaḥ || 26 ||

His footprints are verily holy Gaya, Akshayavata (the imperishable banyan tree) and Prayag, the king of holy waters. Salutations to such a guru again and again.

The preceding story is not a mere instance of poetic flamboyance, but a stark truth in relation to a *jnani* like Bhagavan. No wonder that whoever had but a look from Bhagavan – being Brahman in manifested form – enjoyed the purificatory effect of oblations in the holiest of holy waters. Need we doubt that the two pall-bearers were purified the moment they came in for Bhagavan's darshan?

## 81. Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal\*

**I**nterviewer: Please tell us about how you first came to Ramanasramam.

Ramani Ammal: My chosen deity in childhood was Lord Krishna. From my youth I had very pleasant dreams and would sometimes see Lord Krishna or other familiar deities in these dreams. But at the age of sixteen or seventeen I once

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\* She briefly told her life story in an interview videotaped in December 1989.

saw a strange sage-like person coming down a hill and was captivated by his grandeur. I later came to realise that this sage was Sri Bhagavan.

After having that vision of Bhagavan in my dream, a certain fear that had gripped me for some time all of a sudden disappeared. My relatives and others noticed this and commented how I was now moving about freely. This was Bhagavan's first influence on me.

Also, at the age of sixteen I was reading the *Jnana Vasishta*. While reading it I experienced that I was enveloped in jyoti, a bright white light. I thought that if this is what happens just by reading it, how much more wonderful would it be if we practised dhyana and the other spiritual injunctions taught in the book. I used to be thrilled simply by reading those ancient Tamil scriptures. But it wasn't until I was twenty before I got hold of a book on Bhagavan.

Kumaraswami Raja, the Chief Minister of Madras, who was a cousin of mine, brought me Suddhananda Bharati's biography of Bhagavan, *Ramana Vijayam*, in 1946. Mrs. Kumaraswami Raja was very fond of me, and though other relatives prohibited me from reading spiritual books, she used to stealthily supply me with them. The day she sent this book over with a boy, I was sitting in the house with a friend, a headmistress, who though Christian, was sincerely interested in our religion.

The boy who brought the book said, "Mami said to hand this book to you." I got up and went up to the gate to receive it. The moment I touched the book I lost body consciousness. My whole body became stiff. I somehow managed to return and sit next to my friend. Noticing my plight, she commented that I shouldn't read such books that make me forget myself. Everyone was complaining about this same thing, for in those days most of the time I would be sitting quietly, alert to my spiritual aspirations. All thought that I was simply idle with no work to do.

With difficulty I opened *Ramana Vijayam* to the first page and was met by the photo of the young Ramana. I became speechless. My friend, who was somewhat alarmed at my condition, had to leave and I somehow saw her off. With great reverence I took the book and started reading it. As I read, my eyes kept closing involuntarily, and I was drawn within, which I later came to know was meditation. Bhagavan taught me meditation in this way.

After reading this book, I felt I should leave home and go meet Ramana Maharshi. It is my family custom that women never even leave the house, not to mention leaving the town. That *vairagya*, or desperate determination to leave my house for spiritual fulfilment, was implanted in me by this book; and I am sure it was by the direct influence of Sri Bhagavan himself.

Because of my intense desire to go and see Bhagavan, my younger brother was moved to help me. He is a very pious person, with a soft nature. With his help I secretly left home and reached Tiruvannamalai and the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan. But after reaching there, I was overcome with a sense of guilt for running away from home. This feeling of guilt, and a sense of bringing ill fame to the respected Rajagopalan family, was uppermost in my mind when I first came into Bhagavan's presence. I felt depressed because of this.

When I arrived, I went to the office to inquire where Bhagavan was. I was told that Bhagavan was near the well. When I came near the well, I saw a thatched shed next to it and all I could see in it was a flaming fire. I thought to myself, "I asked for directions to go to Bhagavan and they have sent me to a sacrificial place where there is a fire." It was only after a few minutes that I saw Bhagavan's comely form emerge from those flames. Even when I had the *Jyoti Darshana* I was blaming myself, thinking that I had this delusion of seeing a fire instead of Bhagavan because I was foolish enough to come out into the hot sun. It was only afterwards I realised

Bhagavan had bestowed upon me this great boon of *Jyoti Darshana*. Next I heard Bhagavan saying to me, “You have now come home. Why don’t you sit down?”

Coming from a family where women never go out, and having never gone out myself, I did not know how to behave in company. When Bhagavan said “You have now come home. You can sit down,” I sat down right in front of him and not in the place reserved for women. For three days I kept sitting in front of him and all the while the feeling of guilt for running away from home was haunting me. I kept sitting in front of Bhagavan, not knowing how to act or ask questions, or anything else.

On the third day I heard Bhagavan telling someone: “I also ran away from my home, and at the railroad station I was so frightened that anyone could have identified me as a runaway, caught hold of me and sent me home. I ran away like a thief.” When Bhagavan narrated this, it completely wiped out all my guilt feelings from that moment onwards. This was an act of pure grace directed towards me. It is very strange that by those few words Bhagavan entirely removed any residual fear in me. Bhagavan later said that sometimes you have to do a wrong thing to achieve the ultimate right thing. He even commented that there is nothing wrong in a woman running away at the tender age of twenty to come here.

I should narrate how my first *Giripradakshina* took place. I was not accustomed to walking at all, but whenever people came to tell Bhagavan that they were going on a *Giripradakshina*, I longed to go too. One day Venkataramayya and others were going around the hill, and in this group there were two devotees who were over eighty years old. I did not say anything to Bhagavan but was all the time praying that I should be included in that party. Immediately Bhagavan said to Venkataramayya “Take this girl – the one seated there – with you.” Bhagavan didn’t stop there, for he even said, “She will walk very slowly. Will that be all right?” Then Bhagavan

turned towards me and said, “These are our own people. Are you prepared to go with them?” Looking at me, he simply said, “Go!”

The *Pradakshina* took almost six hours. At Adi Annamalai I could move no more. I requested the group to proceed without me and told them I will reach the Ashram later. But they said, “How could we leave you when Bhagavan entrusted you to us? Even if it takes you another day to complete the *Pradakshina*, we will stay with you. Only with you can we re-enter the Ashram.”

I was again feeling very guilty when we finally arrived. I was thinking that others take three to four hours to complete the *Pradakshina* and I have taken six hours, wasting not only my time, but theirs too. I felt that they were all older than me, and a younger person, like me, had caused them so much inconvenience. When I entered the Ashram, my heart was heavy with this feeling. With great difficulty we entered into the presence of Bhagavan and as soon as I sat down, Bhagavan started narrating how the *Pradakshina* should be done by walking as slow as a royal queen in her ninth month of pregnancy. “So, there is nothing wrong in what she did,” he concluded. After this, many times I used to go around the hill all alone.

I used to fast a lot in those days – almost fifteen days out of a month. It was helping in my sadhana. One day, with the permission of Chinna Swami, I stayed in the Ashram till 7:30 p.m., which is the supper time. Bhagavan turned to me and said, “Aren’t you coming for supper?” Then he said, “Sattvic food should be eaten. There is no meaning in mere fasting.” Since then I stopped fasting. Even if I wanted to fast, for some reason or other it would be broken. That is a real wonder to me.

I was not aware of this Brahmin-non-Brahmin separation in the Dining Hall. One day I entered and saw the screen dividing the seating area. Some people were already seated. I was in a fix as to where I should sit. Bhagavan saw my

plight and asked me to sit right next to him. He said to an attendant, “She doesn’t know anything, so put her leaf here.” Then he said to me, “Don’t worry about these Brahmins.” That is how Bhagavan in his kindness used to take care of me, for I was all alone and ignorant of the customs and ways of the world. Since Bhagavan was showering all this personal attention on me, Chinna Swami also took a personal interest in my welfare. As Muruganar was away, Chinna Swami offered me his residence to stay in, and also offered to send someone to guard me. I told him that I was not afraid and would lock the house from inside and needed no one to guard me. Bhagavan overheard this and said, “She is a young girl, and does not know the consequences. Let her sleep indoors, behind closed doors, but you send a servant to sleep outside on the verandah.” I did not know anything when I came here. Even cooking I learned here and, of course, Bhagavan taught me many things from within.

Interviewer: Since you used to sit in front of Bhagavan quite often, could you please give a detailed description of what is called ‘Bhagavan’s Glance of Grace?’

Ramani Ammal: Bhagavan’s look was real magic. You could not do anything but just look into his eyes, which would transform you into Samadhi. Everyone in the hall used to feel Bhagavan was looking at them alone. This was the true experience of each one of us. In his inimitable way he was giving the glance of grace to each and every one seated in the hall. Bhagavan’s look used to take us deep into Samadhi. Just by looking into his eyes, we came to know what meditation is. This was, and is, the common experience of all devotees. You ask anyone and you will get the same reply.

Once he gave me such a look and for a very long time I was absorbed in Samadhi. Bhagavan was reading the newspaper, letters were being brought in, normal activity was going on, but I was oblivious of the happenings outside of me. In fact, I was unaware of my body.

I once remember a Harijan lady who for the past twenty-five years was gathering honey to send to Sri Bhagavan. On every occasion she was unable to bring the honey herself and had to send it with someone. After waiting for twenty-five years, she finally found the opportunity to come. The poor lady was in tattered clothes, standing before Bhagavan. Her eyesight was poor and I still vividly recall the unusual way she looked at Sri Bhagavan, calling out “Oh Darling, where are you? I want to see you.” Bhagavan in all his graciousness said, “Granny, look this way. I am here.” Looking at the honey she had brought with her, he said to me, “They are Brahmins, they won’t eat this. We will share it and eat it.”

It is often said, Bhagavan did not give direct *Upadesa*, but what else is all this? Although Bhagavan repeatedly pointed out human frailty, people were not prepared to rectify themselves.

As if talking to himself, he looked at this poor old woman in ragged clothes and said, “Poor lady, she must be hungry. And where will she go for clothes? Who will offer her food and clothes?” Upon hearing this, Ondu Reddiyar got up and said, “We will give her food and also see that some clothes are purchased.” Then Reddiyar took the woman to the Dining Hall and fed her sumptuously. He also sent someone to town to buy her a sari. As the old woman had no money, she had walked a great distance to come here. Bhagavan knowing this, said in an impersonal way, “Would anyone be interested in getting her a bus ticket?” Reddiyar again came forward and said, “We will provide her with a bus ticket and see her off.” When this lady returned from the Dining Hall she was touching the ground, and then touching her eyes. That is a way of prostration and thanksgiving. It is noteworthy that whenever the poor or untouchables came, Bhagavan took a very personal interest in them, which was a moving sight to see.

Sri Bhagavan had absolutely no connection with either body or mind. People used to be confused by seeing him

read letters and newspapers. His inner state never changed since he was sixteen. This was demonstrated repeatedly, but only those who had the eyes to see, could see and realise it. Sri Bhagavan was also a real taskmaster. He used to quietly move around to various places within the Ashram without notice. So, every place had to be kept clean and neat because Bhagavan was very particular about cleanliness. He was also particular about punctuality. This kept every member of the Ashram alert and on their toes, ready at all times to do what was necessary. Look how this Ashram has grown. Unless Bhagavan was very careful in his silent supervision, could it have grown to this extent?

Interviewer: Where were you at the time of Sri Bhagavan's *Maha Nirvana*?

Ramani Ammal: I was at Rajapalayam. That night I saw a blue light beautifully rising up into the sky. I knew Bhagavan had left the body. I felt that I did not want to live after that and started a fast. By fasting I wanted to drop the body. After five or six days of not touching food I had several visions. In one of them I was taken inside the Arunachala Hill and saw there, rishis performing *yagnas* and yoga. I also saw Sri Bhagavan seated there. Some munis or rishis offered some prasad to Bhagavan. Then Sri Bhagavan himself gave it to me, and I was made to eat. I remembered that I was fasting but couldn't refuse Bhagavan's prasad. How can I say that it was a dream? I consider it was Bhagavan's grace alone. He also said to me, "You say and repeat 'I have gone away, I have gone away'. Where have I gone? I am right here. You are not looking inward. If you look within, I am there." For many days afterwards the smell of that prasad lingered. The aroma even spread all through the house. My brother and sisters kept talking about it. When I was fasting, my brother and sister were also fasting with me. The morning following that vision we started taking food again.

In the dream I also remember Bhagavan was seated near a tank and rishis and munis were serving him. He looked



splendid, gracious, magnanimous, and magnificent. It was a beautiful sight. I saw there Kamadhenu, the celestial cow, the celestial tree, and many other wonderful things. It was a divine sight indeed. From that day onwards, I had no thought at all that Bhagavan had left us. He is all pervading, and I experienced him particularly in my Heart. I no longer felt sorrow. He is even here now.

When I came again to Tiruvannamalai I was filled with bliss. You can feel Bhagavan's presence every minute. Right this very minute I feel his Divine Presence. I have no unhappiness. I am happy all the time. Sri Bhagavan's Presence is so overpowering. See how we all are gathered here. What have we done to deserve this?

Interviewer: To my knowledge I haven't done anything good and I also wonder, along with you, how Bhagavan has gathered us here.

Ramani Ammal: I can't say that I have ever done anything bad. From my childhood I didn't know what is good and what is bad either. But doing good or bad has nothing to do with our coming to Bhagavan's Presence. It is only by his grace that we are filled with his glorious Presence.

## 82. The Tiger's Prey\*

**W**hy does Ramana enter a person's life and how? No one but He knows the answer. The experience of many is testimony for His silent, dew-like entry into a life to redeem it, to make it whole. Things would be made easy for the life giving contact, a friend would provide the fare, money would come from unexpected quarters, bosses would not only permit but even strongly suggest visiting the Maharshi and Sri Ramanasramam. In far off Spain a book, to spark the interest, would be placed in one's hand though the why of it would

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\* A.R. Natarajan, *The Mountain Path*, July 1985.

not be known to the receiver of grace. Years in India would have been wasted with no knowledge of the Master's life or teachings and then suddenly without notice every worthwhile book would come to the person's notice, making them 'the breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner' of the fortunate one. Be it a small village in Netherlands, or a forest hermitage Ramana would step in quietly and claim His flock. Often He would literally give His shoulder, strong enough to hold the burden of the Universe, to a devotee in need of the help and solace. Not a single word may be exchanged in months, but 'wonderful grace would be poured in' through the 'incomparable grace of His steady and shining eyes'. Drug addiction would end just by the penetrating look.

Looking at the mysterious ways of Ramana's advent into the lives of His 'marked' people one is reminded of the story of Saint Sundaramurthy, narrated by Ramana to Suri Nagamma. Sundaramurthy was seated before the sacred fire all set for marriage, awaiting his bride. At this twelfth hour, the great God, Siva appeared in the guise of an old brahmin to stop the marriage and claim him as His own. Siva produced the necessary document to prove that the bridegroom was pledged, forever, to serve Him. Sundaramurthy reviled Siva as a 'madman' only to fall headlong into devoted service when the truth of the relationship was revealed as a relationship which was not bound by time. Hasn't Ramana Himself hinted to Chadwick that the Guru and the disciple are bound together, always, cutting through time-barriers? Once Ramana enters a life, 'the burning sand' of the worldly life would be carpeted 'laden thick with fragrant flowers' and a 'strange gladness would fill the journey homeward', to the Heart. Not that one would be freed from Maya's sway straightaway, but it is certain that His grip would be tight and firm, never letting one stray away altogether from the quest. One becomes Ramana's food no matter however vile, however sinful one may be. Can a prey which has fallen into a spider's web or a tiger's jaw escape?

But when? How long should one toss between the profane and the divine? To be drawn to that great force and yet to be denied the feel of its Presence, as it often happens, is a torture. Ramana's magnetic body did not go the way of all flesh in April 1950. The vivid, tangible, even physical impact continues to be felt sometimes through dreams and visions but always felt by those whom Ramana has chosen to make His for some unaccountable reason.

True, Ramana's entry into one's life cannot be in vain. But for those who are content to remain in the sidelines, for those the good and bad fruits of Karma are still tasty, the full impact of the great Presence is not yet. Their contact with eternity is all too brief. The time has not come for them to taste, in full measure, the entry of the *Sadguru* in their lives.

It is a different story for those whom Ramana charms totally, who are taken over body and soul, in a no holds barred union. Such ones have no eyes except for that indescribable wonder, the Master's eyes. They cannot escape the bewitchment of His smile. Nothing matters to them, save to be His and let His Presence seep through every pore of their body. The joy of self-forgetfulness, of oneness, fills their Being.

This mood, however, is not for keeps, nor even 'till death do us part'. Imperceptibly, the bodily hunger, the demands of flesh, stage a virulent come back to the point of negating the joy of being Ramana's. It is certain that Ramana will not leave anyone by the roadside and that His succour would be there to strengthen and sustain. But in the intermediate stage when one is not steadfast in love for Ramana, many ego-traps of attachments seem to be there ready to lure one away. For, when the *Sadguru's* tiger-like fangs begin to chew up one's ego, the job is never done at one stroke. It is often left incomplete to be finished at a time which He alone knows to be the best. In this half-way house when one is tossed between the sensate and the spiritual, when one is neither His nor the world's, one is inclined to pray sometimes 'Please

stop being a magnet. Do not take me at all or take all.” It appears as if Ramana is aloof, withdrawn, unconcerned. Not that He is really, but the dryness, the slipping away makes one forlorn.

Sometimes then one cries out in anguish ‘where have you gone my God, forsaking me?’ One yearns and prays ‘put out this fire, sweet, cool ocean of boundless grace, put out this fire of separation’. One finds Ramana’s ‘*Arunachala Padigam*’ replete with pleadings to the Sad-guru not to ‘stop mid-way and leave the task unfinished’. How truly reflective of the longing, the pining for the impersonal beloved who walked on earth as Ramana!

Occasionally the mood of rebellion too sets in. What else can one do except to chaff at the Master’s indifference, except to fret and fume at His hide and seek? Must we be a plaything of our Master if we escape being fate’s plaything? Why should He leave one to be lost in the company of the worldly? Why should we have to keep company with those who know nothing of His endless beauty? Why does He not enchant by revealing Himself in all His radiant splendour? Why does He ‘like poison loath, the love that was once honey-sweet?’

One may question thus: one may feel that He is not doing enough to take over quickly. One may curse the apparently snail-paced working of His grace. But all said and done for those who care for Him only, there can be no question of going back. Their boats have been burnt. Inscrutable are His ways. There may be no holiday from the unfoldment of fate’s merry-go-round. Fate’s whiplashes may or may not be blunted. Loneliness may be one’s lot. Then one has to remember that having surrendered, the right to question why has also gone. When the dark cloud of doubt and despondency grips one, then suddenly the *Sadguru* is there giving His firm hand for the heart-ward journey. Having bartered His glorious state for our paltry self, He steps in almost at the very last second when one is ready to throw up one’s hand in despair. Out of

the blue the mighty, primal power of Ramana courses through one's vein. His tiger-like grip tightens, and one becomes, fully, His prey. Once and for all the sorrow of a divisive life centred on the ego ends. As one remains firmly rooted in the natural state which he restores, happiness brims over, within, without and everywhere.

### **83. In Memoriam The Holy Cow, Lakshmi**

**(Archives of Sri Ramanasramam)**

**Passed into the Light on 18th June, 1948 at 11.30 a.m.**

**Harindranath Chattopadhyaya**

Before the Golden Sage who reigneth still  
At the wide foot of the celestial Hill  
Arunachala-lord of the Beacon Light,  
I bow in reverence, and then rise to write  
This song about the Cow who, ere she died,  
Was by His touch of mercy deified  
And set among the Immortals who continue  
To breathe as Light within me and within you.  
Lord of Grace! thy holy Name resounds  
From end to end; thy Mercy knows no bounds,  
Thy Power no limitation! Through thy Peace  
The struggles of thy seekers slowly cease  
Leaving a large contentment in the heart:  
Before thy luminous Presence glooms depart,  
Clouds vanish ... In the stillness of thine eye  
The all-unseeing fool grows sudden wise,  
The ignorant grow learned. With a smile  
Thou canst redeem us in a fleeting while,

Rendering our lives significant. O thou  
Who wearest realisation on thy  
Even as a jewel! With what master-ease  
Thou dost immortalise thy devotees!  
And thou art worshipped everywhere by all  
Who, touched by thy deep Grace, have heard thee call  
And gathered at thy Feet: numerous shapes  
Of peacocks, squirrels, deer, and dogs and apes,  
Of cows and men. And from them thou dost draw  
Thy chosen few according to a Law  
Known but to thee, whom, drenching in thy Love  
Thou dost, to each, allot a height above  
Earth's little level, that they may arise  
From hells of flesh to the soul's paradise.  
It is for her I sing who is no more  
Lakshmi, the Master's sacred Cow, who bore  
The beauty of a goddess – she who was  
Experience carved out of luminous pause  
And moulded into creature line and curve;  
Lakshmi, the Mother Cow, was born to serve  
Sage Ramana  
Yet, it was nothing strange,  
Some say her creature form was but a change  
From human, since – such is the story told –  
She was a woman once, wizened and old,  
Her wrinkled body all in tatters clad,  
But held behind that ugliness she had  
A lamplike soul that bade her self engage  
In long and selfless service of the sage.  
She came to Him through many noons and eves  
Bringing Him simple fare of herbs and leaves  
Plucked with devotion, cooked with love and care,  
And, it is said, He ate the humble fare  
As though it were a banquet!  
Serving thus  
She died and passed into the luminous

Lakshmi that she might serve Him once again  
And so, through service, finally attain  
Self-knowledge and release....  
Great Master! thou  
Art all-compassionate. Upon the brow  
Of self-surrender thou dost seal thy Grace  
And dost, in a miraculous while, efface  
Bondage and grief. In thy compassion's ken  
Dumb creatures share an equal place with men.  
Thy law is universal, working out  
Even through layers and layers of lampless doubt  
Ultimate faith which sees thee as thou art:  
Master Illumination of the heart!  
Even so did Lakshmi know thee, Master! When  
She breathed and moved amidst a world of men  
Who scarcely know thee. Even as a cloud  
Moves in the wide horizon, glow-endowed  
And solitarily she moved with Grace  
Within thy Love's horizontal embrace;  
Within thy Mercy's garden, hour by hour,  
She grew from bud to flower, and then from flower  
Into the ripened fruit of wisdom hued  
With subtle hues of inward solitude.  
And while she was a bud she lit the air  
With delicate sweetness making us aware  
Of some high mission to be done through her;  
Then, in the flowering state, she seemed to stir  
The hermitage with more-than-human power,  
And everywhere she went she was a flower  
Scattering fragrance drawn from inwardness;  
The Master met her soul, beyond our guess,  
In high communion and absolute  
Love that transformed the flower into the fruit  
Of ultimate ripe attainment.  
She has passed  
Into His shining vast

Of Essence, beyond form and name;  
She has become a Flame  
Upon His quiet altar which shall burn  
Forevermore, lending at every turn  
Light to our hearts and splendour to our minds; Dark  
Death, the wind of winds,  
Cannot disturb it on that altar burning:  
She will no more in any form occur,  
The law of evolution no more binds  
her great untrammelled spirit. Lo, for her  
There is no more returning!  
Yet, let us see what was the heritage  
Which brought Her to the all-compassionate Sage?  
What strange unearthly scope  
Embodied in her horoscope  
And in herself? this creature made of earth,  
What gave the high significance to her birth?  
What penance and what prayer  
In other births than this, her last,  
Did she perform, scaling stair upon stair  
Of pure illumination in the past  
Closing in ultimate ripeness?  
Let us unveil  
before the world her fascinating tale:  
In nineteen twenty-six, four mortal years  
After the passing of the Sage's Mother  
Into the State of Light and Liberation,  
Granted to Her by the great Seer of Seers,  
A bhakta came to offer salutation  
To Him, and brought with him a gift along,  
A cow and a she-calf, lovely and strong  
The rose-red season-ache in blood and limb,  
With tenderness the creatures gazed on Him  
And knew He was their Lord...  
He only smiled  
And gently said: "The Mother and her child Need



tending with devotion, love and care.  
 So, take them back, and know that I am there  
 Wherever they may be ...”  
 Arunachala Pillai  
 “Lord, they are thine,  
 Have mercy and accept them. Every line  
 Contour and curve of them are thine alone.  
 It is a gift I make thee, humbly bowed  
 In reverence. I pray, do not disown  
 The humble gift....”  
 Out of the crowd  
 Emerged a little man, who hardly spoke  
 At other times, a puny fragile man  
 Whose words collected to a master-stroke  
 And seemed thrice pregnant with some future plan  
 Of which he was unconscious.  
 Ramanatha Dikshitar  
 It is my prayer  
 The offering be accepted in this place  
 They shall remain receiving love and care  
 Fed not on fodder merely, but Thy Grace!

## **84. Ramana-Arunachala\***

One of the great epics is finished, one of the supreme manifestations of Divine Grace, when God wore a human body and moved and talked with men as Bhagavan Sri Ramana, called Maharshi, the Great Rishi. This was no case of an ordinary Guru, even though to call any Guru ‘ordinary’ may sound absurd. The Guru is on a higher plane than ordinary mortals, but Bhagavan was not on any plane: he was man abiding in constant, unwavering consciousness of identity with the Self which is God or to express the same

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\* Arthur Osborne, *The Call Divine*, January 1955.

from the other side, he was God wearing a human body and submitting deliberately to human limitations. For fifty-four years his wearing the body was one long sacrifice for our redemption, and at the end the sacrifice became a martyrdom.

This acceptance of the body with its limitations gave rise to a combination of knowledge and human restrictions on knowledge which puzzled many visitors to Bhagavan. His spiritual knowledge was complete and constant. He spoke always with authority. There was no question of samadhi; because he was always in samadhi: he was always consciously *Atma*, the Supreme, Divine, ‘Undivided, Imperishable Self. Therefore, every utterance of his was a divine statement, every explanation a scripture.

And yet he showed the same human ignorance as ordinary mortals. He would ask whether so and so had arrived, how such and such a sick person was faring, and so forth. Many visitors and some devotees found this incongruous and asked how it was that one who had Divine Knowledge should not know whether a ship had arrived or a medicine worked. This was because they did not envisage the magnitude of his sacrifice and the immensity of his compassion. When he consented to wear the human form after transcending the human and all other states, he accepted all its limitations – to feel heat and cold to suffer pain and sickness, to be bound by ignorance of events. Had he won a human body but set himself free from its conditions of pains and sickness and ignorance of events, people would have said: “It is easy for him to tell us to abide in the Heart, unperturbed by events, because he has no pain or uncertainty and we have.” So, he accepted pain and uncertainty as features of the human form and showed that they cannot touch the equanimity of the *Jnani* who remains fixed immovably in the Real. This gave force to his teaching, since he was but exhorting his devotees to do as he did.

Normally one who acquires great knowledge acquires lesser knowledge by the way, as Christ said that to him who

attains the Kingdom of Heaven all else is added: but this was neither a case of a Yogi struggling up from one state of knowledge to another nor of one attaining a high state and being rewarded, as it were, with all the lower states; it was something simpler and immeasurably vaster: it was a man dying to the body and living in absolute identity with the Divine Self and then deliberately accepting all the body's limitations out of compassion for suffering mankind.

Just as Bhagavan accepted the limitations of human knowledge, so did he accept the limitations of human powers. There have been Spiritual Masters who have worked miracles to exhibit the supremacy of spiritual laws over physical and to show men what a resplendent birthright was theirs for the taking, but the purpose of Bhagavan was different: it was to show that it is possible to remain fixed in the Self amid all the limitations of human life. Therefore, he used no powers that others do not use. Therefore, he set an example of submission not only to human suffering and ignorance of events but even to the laws and conditions of the world in this Dark Age. The laws and conditions which, for him were reflected in the rules of the ashram authorities. And thus, those who found the laws irksome had before them the example of Bhagavan's own submission.

It is true that sickness and misfortune often disappeared when Bhagavan was told of them, but this was like the involuntary miracle of Christ when a sick woman touched the hem of his garment and was cured. It was the spontaneous outflow of his infinite compassion. A child was in high fever and said to his mother: "Don't call a doctor, just tell Bhagavan." She told Bhagavan and next morning the child was well; but there was no deliberate miracle, simply the child's faith and Bhagavan's spontaneous compassion.

And yet, more often, the compassion worked not in removing misfortunes but in giving peace in spite of them.

A woman bereaved of her husband, a father whose only son had died, would come and pour out their tale of anguish

to him and he would say nothing but simply turn on them his luminous eyes, shining with love and understanding, and peace would fill their heart.

We, in our materialist age, have been blessed with a ministration comparable only to that of a Buddha, a Christ, a Sankara; and the measure of our materialism is indifference that our world as a whole has shown. With all its talk of ideals and causes, it has ignored the real blessedness of the age as blindly as the Romans ignored Christ.

However, the teaching of Sri Ramana is, by its nature, not intended to cause such an upheaval as that of Buddha or Christ, for he did not come, as they did, to enunciate a new doctrinal form. His purpose was to open up a new spiritual path for men. Apart from his outpouring of Grace upon all who turned to him, Bhagavan Sri Ramana had a definite spiritual message for mankind. That message still continues and is the reason why this article is necessary. It is more than a message; it is a pathway to Beatitude.

The Sages have always agreed that the type of sadhana suited to the *Kali-Yuga* is pre-eminently *Nama-Japa*, the invocation of the Divine Name. They have agreed also that the *Jnana-Marga*, the ‘direct path’ is not suited to the *Kali-Yuga*. The task undertaken by Bhagavan Sri Ramana was to reopen the *Jnana-Marga* to mankind. Throughout half a century of teaching he constantly reiterated that this is the best, the most direct and the surest path. “Self-enquiry is the one infallible means, the only direct one, to realise the unconditioned, absolute Being that you really are.” As I shall show later, his leaving the body has not abrogated this boon to mankind: and therefore, a brief description of the *Jnana-Marga* as taught by him is here necessary.

He called it the path of *vichara* or self-enquiry. His instructions were to sit in meditation, concentrating the Consciousness on the Heart – not the physical heart on the left, but the spiritual heart on the right side of the chest, and at the same time to concentrate on the question: “Who am

I?” He was especially insistent on this supreme centre of consciousness. The following is one of the simpler illustrations that he gave of it.” When a school boy says ‘It is I that did the sum’ or when he asks you ‘Shall I run and get the book for you?’ does he point to the head that did the sum or to the legs that will carry him to get you the book? No, in both cases his finger is pointed quite naturally to the right side of the chest, thus giving innocent expression to the profound truth that the source of I-ness in him is there. It is an unerring intuition that makes him refer to himself, to the Heart which is the Self, in that way. The act is quite involuntary and universal, that is to say it is the same in the case of every individual”.

He insisted that it is necessary to try, not to argue. “You should try to have rather than to locate the experience. A man need not find out where his eyes are situated when he wants to see. The Heart is there, ever open to you if you care to enter it, ever supporting all your movements even when you are unaware.” After some practice this meditation awakens a current of awareness, a consciousness of ‘I’ in the Heart – not the ego-sense but a feeling of the essential ‘I’ who is the universal Self – unaffected by good or ill fortune or by sickness or health. This consciousness should be developed by constant effort until it becomes more and more frequent and finally a constant undertone to all the actions of life. Then all that is needed is to refrain from interference by egoism so that it may deepen into an ever-vaster peace beyond all understanding until the moment when it will consume the ego and remain as the abiding realisation of Self.

For a long time, this process requires stimulation by the constant query “Who am I?” I am not this body which changes but leaves me the same. Nor am I these thoughts which pass through the mind and go out again, leaving me the same. What then am I? If various thoughts come up during meditation, do not get caught up by them and follow them out, but look at them and ask; “Where did this thought come from, and why and to whom?” And so, they pass away

and each thought leads back to the basic I-thought: and who am I? It is of the very essence of the meditation that there is no mental or verbal answer. There cannot be, since the Self transcends thought and words. The answer is only the awakening of the current of awareness, the sense of being, in the Heart. And this awareness is neither physical nor mental, though body and mind are both aware of it. It can no more be described than hearing could be described to a deaf man.

If impure thoughts arise during meditation they are to be looked at and dispelled in the same way, for in this way the evil tendencies in one are discovered, seen and dissipated. “All kinds of thoughts arise in meditation. That is only right, for what lies hidden in you is brought out. Unless it rises up how can it be destroyed?”

Every spiritual path requires both purity of living and intensity of spiritual effort, and the *vichara* was given by Bhagavan as a technique of pure and dispassionate living no less than as a technique of meditation. If anything happens to offend or flatter you: Who is injured, who is pleased or angry, who am I? The word ‘frustration’ is much in vogue nowadays, but who is frustrated?

So, by use of the *vichara*, the I-am-the doer illusion can be destroyed and it is possible to take part in the life of the world aloofly, without vanity or attachment, being, as St. Paul said, “in the world but not of it.” Bhagavan represented it as the bank cashier who handles lakhs of rupees unemotionally and yet quite efficiently because he knows that it is not his money. In the same impersonal way, a man can attend to all the affairs of life, knowing that he, the real Self, is unaffected by them; and every attack of greed, anger or desire can be dispelled by the *vichara*. It must be dispelled, because it is no use repeating that one is the Self and acting as though one were the ego. Real, even partial, awareness of the Self weakens egoism; egoism, whether expressed as vanity, greed or desire, is a proof that recognition of the Self is merely mental.

This twofold use of the *vichara* means that the perfect *Jnana-Marga* which Sri Bhagavan brought to the world is also perfect *Karma-Marga*.

What Bhagavan did, and what could not have been done by any but Bhagavan himself, was to give mankind a type of Sadhana that is peculiarly suited to our modern age. This new dispensation goes even beyond the use of the *vichara* in the relief it gives. It has always been obligatory to the sadhaka to adhere strictly to the forms of his religion, whatever this might be, and it has usually been preferable to withdraw from the life of the world. But in the conditions of life in the modern world both these obligations are often difficult and sometimes impossible, and Bhagavan absolved those who followed him from both. He never asked what religion any of his devotees followed or whether they followed any formal religion at all. He never encouraged any to profess Hinduism. He prescribed *vichara* alike to all who asked him the way, whether Hindus or of any other religion or of none. In fact, (and to this point I shall return) by no means all his devotees practised the *vichara*. Many basked in the glow of his love while making some other sadhana or without making conscious sadhana. His Grace was upon all alike. But for those who did practise the *vichara* he held it natural for this to supersede all other techniques of sadhana.

Also, he never encouraged any to give up life in the world. He explained that it would only be exchanging the thought “I am a householder” for the thought “I am a sannyasin”, whereas what is necessary is to reject the thought “I am the doer” completely and remember only “I am”; and this can be done by means of the *vichara* as well in the city as in the jungle. It is only inwardly that a man can leave the world by leaving the ego-sense; it is only inwardly that he can withdraw into solitude by abiding in the universal solitude of the Heart, which is solitude only because there are no others, however many forms the Self may assume.

This was Bhagavan's purpose on earth; the opening of a path that can be followed by the housewife, the bank clerk, the ship's engineer, as well as by the priest or the sannyasin.

*Upadesa* implies also *diksha*. Bhagavan was as categorical as every other Spiritual Master that realisation is possible only through a Guru. "It is impossible except at the feet of the Master and in his divine Presence for the seeker to reach and abide in that true and primal state of pure being, or the Self, wherein the mind is entirely subdued and all its activity has completely ceased. Although he admits that in very rare cases no outer Guru may be necessary: "It is very seldom that a person can realise his true Being without the Grace of the Master." When it was objected to him once that he himself had no Guru, he replied simply: "The Guru need not necessarily take human form."

And yet Bhagavan himself did not give initiation in the usual way. When asked whether he was a Guru and gave initiation he always avoided a direct reply. Had the reply been 'no' he would most certainly have said 'no'. But had he said 'yes' he would immediately have been besieged by demands for initiation and would have been driven to make a distinction between disciples and devotees, between those who were drawn to the sadhana of the *vichara* and those who were drawn to him simply by love and devotion. And his compassionate love was too great and his wisdom too shrewd to act in a way that would lead some to think that he ranked them higher than others. Indeed, he did not, since he saw the Self in all.

When asked whether he gave initiation, Bhagavan's most usual reply was that there are three types of initiation, by speech, by look and by silence. This left the burden of understanding upon the enquirer. It is an old tradition, the three types being symbolised by the bird, which needs to sit on its eggs in order to hatch them, the fish, which needs only to look at them, and the tortoise, which needs only to think



of them. Initiation by look or silence is most natural to the *Jnana-Marga*.

‘Bhagavan gave initiation by look and by silence’. Initiation by look was given to those who came to the ashram and were drawn to the use of the *vichara*. It was a concentrated piercing look which penetrated into the very depths of a man’s being. It was frequently given at some time, such as the chanting of the Vedas, when not many would be aware of it. Only such as had experienced the same initiation would be aware what was happening if they chanced to be watching. Initiation by silence was given to those who turned to Bhagavan for guidance but were unable to come physically to Tiruvannamalai. And once there had been initiation the spiritual guidance was precise, subtle and continuous, even though with no word spoken.

This initiation by silence still continues and will continue. This was the purpose of Bhagavan in living in human form among us. He has made true for all mankind what was true for him; that the Guru need not take human form. Christ enunciated a universal law of Divine Mercy when he said that whoever seeks will find; but in order to find it is necessary to be reborn as the spiritual child of a Guru, and in our materialistic age there are few genuine Gurus to be found. Only the presence of Bhagavan on earth could atone for this paucity of spiritual guidance and open a door to those who seek.

Before speaking of the continuance of Bhagavan’s *mouna-diksha* it is best to say something, though very briefly, of the death of his body. For years this body had been tortured by rheumatism. The knees were swollen and he walked stiff-legged and with difficulty and had to give up his daily walks on the sacred hill, Arunachala. Over a year ago a small tumor appeared on the left elbow. It was cut out but returned worse than before. Then it was recognized as serious. Various kinds of treatment were given, and Bhagavan submitted to whatever was prescribed. Three more times it was cut out, and after

each operation it returned worse and higher up. Already in December the doctors said they could do no more. The tumor, after four operations, had reached the shoulder and gone inwards. The doctors said that the pain must be excruciating, though Bhagavan seldom gave any sign that he was suffering. The whole system was poisoned, and the last months were one long martyrdom. And yet to the last he insisted that all those who came to him should receive darshan twice a day, walking past the room where he lay. At the very end, when every touch was agony, he ordered the attendants to raise him to a sitting posture, and he died sitting.

This long agony was not his karma. It was our karma that he took on himself. The astrologers had seen nothing in his horoscope to indicate that he should die this year, because it was not his karma. A lady devotee went to him and implored him to give her the sickness, and he replied: “And who gave it to me?” We did, as surely as though we had crucified him, for it was our karma that he took on himself.

A few days before the end of the body he said “They say that I am dying but I shall be more alive here than before.” That is why it needs to be proclaimed now that Bhagavan is still here and the doorway opened by him is still open.

Many years ago, when Bhagavan was still living in a cave on the hill, some sadhus came and asked him for a devotional hymn to help them in their sadhana. He walked round the hill with them, and as he walked he composed the supreme hymn ‘Arunachala-Siva’, tears streaming from his eyes as he sang it. It has always been the great emotional inspiration of the devotees. Arunachala was his Guru. As soon as he had realised the Self he came to Arunachala and he remained there ever after. He allowed it to be known that he is Arunachala. As he was dying a group of devotees sat outside the little room singing ‘Arunachala-Siva’. And that night, when the body that Bhagavan had used and now relinquished was exposed to the view of the devotees in the great hall of the ashram, they sang spontaneously and for the first time ‘Ramana-Arunachala’.

He is Arunachala. He will be more alive at Tiruvannamalai-Arunachala than ever. A shrine or temple is to be raised over his samadhi which, like his Grace, will be open to devotees of all religions. But although he is Arunachala-Tiruvannamalai and, as he said, more alive “here,” at Tiruvannamalai, than before, he is spaceless Arunachala-Siva and will live in the heart of every devotee who turns to him, initiating and guiding even more actively than before, as he himself said; not “as alive” but “more alive” than before. The pathway that he opened for mankind was not for the duration of his body only; it will grow more evident and his support and guidance more potent now that the restriction of a body had been shed.

### **85. Sri Ramana and Arunachala\***

**T**he relationship between Sri Ramana and Arunachala is a grand mystery. To view it from our level ascribing an individuality to both, it was surely antenatal and supramundane. In terms of human relationship, it was that of son and father. That is why Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni has described Sri Ramana as the human incarnation of God Skanda the Son of the Supreme Lord Siva.

It is commonly supposed that Sri Ramana heard the first mention of ARUNACHALA from a relative who just returned from Tiruvannamalai to Madurai, and that the hearing of the name sent a thrill through Sri Ramana’s veins. Sri Bhagavan himself told this writer that this version was somewhat erroneous. Even from childhood, he had been hearing the Sanskrit verse that “the mere remembrance of ARUNACHALA confers Mukti (salvation)”. But he had no definite notion of what ARUNACHALA meant. He had a vague idea that ARUNACHALA might be some holiest form of God Almighty. When his relative casually said that

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\* G.V. Subbaramayya, M.A. (Hons.), *The Call Divine*, June 1955.

he returned from Arunachala, the very thought that a mortal could come from that Supreme Being was to him a thrilling revelation. When the visitor further explained that ‘Arunachala’ was only Tiruvannamalai which the boy had already known as the name of a place, it had the effect of anticlimax. It was like a fall from the sublime to the ludicrous, and the thrill at once subsided.

With the death-like trance which instantly snapped the thread of the ego and gave him Self-Realisation, there arose in the person of Sri Ramana an unaccountable pang which grew in time till it became unbearable agony. It created an aversion in him to his school lessons and other routine activities. It inclined him to study the lives of saints, to visit the temple of Meenakshi nearby and pray for Divine Grace and to sit still in Samadhi (Self-absorption) every now and then. Thus it transformed the nature of the boy Ramana completely and it finally disappeared only when he entered the sanctum-sanctorum of the great shrine at Tiruvannamalai and beheld the ‘Lingam’ of Arunachala.

When his elder brother noticed him sitting in Samadhi before his books and rebuked him saying. “Why should one who behaves thus retain all this?”, the thought of ARUNACHALA at once flashed upon his mind and gripped his entire being, “Yes, I must no longer be here ‘cabined, cribbed, confined’. ARUNACHALA is calling. He shall be my heaven, my home.” This resolve that now shaped itself within the boy’s mind, became all-absorbing. It determined and carried out his secret flight from Madurai without any initiative of his own. It dictated his parting letter to his brother. ‘I have in search of my Father and in obedience to His command, started from here’. That was why the letter was left unsigned. Every circumstance favoured his ‘enterprise’. The extra class, the train’s delay, the strange Moulvi’s direction to change at Villupuram, free feeding on the way, Muthukrishna Bhagavatar’s loan; these and other incidents prove beyond doubt the hand of Arunachala holding and drawing the little

one to Himself. When he arrived at the holy shrine, the gates of the three compound walls and all the inner doors were open at an unusual hour in the early morning and there was no one inside. It was clear that Arunachala Himself had thus prepared to welcome His beloved boy. Entering the Holy Presence, Sri Ramana reported himself, saying, “O Father, I have obeyed Your call and come leaving off everything.

The most notable event of Sri Ramana’s journey was his vision of dazzling light (Tejo Darshan) at Arayaninallur. It was the very spot where Saint Jnanasambhandhar had experienced a similar vision on his pilgrimage to Arunachala. Thus both Jnanasambandhar and Ramana had their first glimpse of ARUNACHALA, the far-famed *Tejolingam* (the sign of Light) at the identical place. So Kavyakantha has sung that Jnanasambandhar and Ramana are both reincarnations of God Skanda.

All the rest of Sri Ramana’s life for four and fifty years was spent in Arunachala alone. Within the temple-compound, in the outskirts of the town, up the Hill and down the Hill, he dwelt throughout his life. Never once – not even during the times when the place was declared dangerous on account of epidemics did he stray away from the environs of Arunachala. The very thought of leaving Arunachala never seems to have occurred to him. From his mother down to a casual visitor, so many people attempted to induce him to go elsewhere.

His written reply to his mother’s entreaties was typical and significant: “Whatever is destined not to happen will never happen, try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen must happen, do what you may to prevent it.” In other words, He declared that Arunachala and he were destined to be inseparable.

One evening, Sri Ramana related to this writer and others seated around him, how in his vision Arunachala appeared a citadel of Heaven full of shrines and gods. One morning, when Sri Ramana delayed to return from his constitutional and this writer with another devotee went up and met him,

he said smiling, “As the weather is fine, I have been strolling here. This Hill is like my own home. Whenever I am in Arunachala, I forget myself.”

While relating the glories of Arunachala he would indeed forget himself. The story of Arunachala was his favourite theme. He often used to say that, while all other sacred hills and shrines were but the abodes of various Gods, Arunachala is the Supreme God Himself and that going round Arunachala is the direct worship of God Almighty. Once, in the old Hall, they were reciting Kavyakantha’s “*Forty verses in praise of Sri Ramana*”, one of which extols the unique good fortune of Arunachala for being the chosen abode of Sri Ramana and attributes it to the accumulated merit of providing home for so many sages. On hearing this, Sri Ramana smiled and asked, “But by what merit did Arunachala provide home for those sages?” By this question Sri Ramana meant obviously to emphasise the fact that Arunachala is the Supreme God and naturally therefore drew to Himself Sri Ramana as well as all those sages of yore.

“The Five Hymns to Arunachala “are the ‘magnum opus’ of Sri Ramana in devotional, lyric poetry. Of them the first is *Aksharamanamalai* (the Marital Garland of Letters). It was composed by young Ramana in response to the request of a devotee for a song to be sung while wandering in the town for *Bhiksha* (holy alms). It is an acrostic of one hundred and eight couplets with the initial letters in the alphabetical order, and with a popular refrain. It unfolds an allegorical love-story and depicts the ‘*Madhura Bhava*’ (erotic sentiment) of devotion. Arunachala is the lover and the singer is the beloved. The lover made secret love to the beloved while she was in her paternal home. At the mere thought of his name, he stole her heart. He eloped with her stealthily and brought her here. While She is now harassed by so many enemies, he remains unmoved as a mountain. She remonstrates and complains of her lover’s neglect and indifference.

“Having entered my home and lured me to yours, why do you keep me prisoner in your cavern?... Having seduced and ravished me, if you deny me union and abandon me now, would it be chivalry? Nay, such desertion will be a memorial column of shame for you... Having called me and lured me here, it is writ large in your forehead to look after my well-being... If you will not unite with me, I shall be melting away in tears of anguish... Pray rain your mercy on me else your fire consumes me to ashes.”

So runs her love-plaint. Then for her harsh words of remonstrance, she apologises to her lover and prays for the bliss of complete Union and merging. “Pray close me in, limb to limb, body to body, or I am lost... Let us embrace one in the Real Self on the soft flower-bed of the Mind... Come and sport with me in the open space of the Heart where there is neither night nor day... May I be absorbed into you as food is assimilated into the feeder.”

At last the prayer is fulfilled. The love is consummated in marriage, and with the bride’s invocation to the bridegroom, “O Lord Arunachala, throw around me your garland and let me place on your breast this garland strung by me”, the song concludes. In this poem, Arunachala is described and addressed in the most fascinating terms. Arunachala is ‘the real meaning of OM unexcelled, unparalleled’, ‘the magnet that attracts the iron filings of devotees and holds them fast’, ‘the Ocean of Grace in the mould of a mountain’, ‘the gem of fire sparkling all round’, ‘the treasure of Divine Grace got without seeking’, ‘the elixir of all life’s ills’ ‘the spider whose spreading web entices into its meshes and devours all egos, ‘the wizard who exercises the ghost of the ego and then himself possesses the being’, ‘the mountain-drug for all madness’, ‘the undifferentiated effulgence of final knowledge in Vedanta’.

The word ‘Arul’ (Grace) occurs in nearly every stanza, so that the whole song may be called a rhapsody of Grace. This love-lyric is indeed an allegory of Sri Ramana’s own

life-story and so is full of autobiographical interest. The initial mention of ‘Azhagu’ and ‘Sundaram’ the parents of Sri Ramana, strikes the keynote to the personal strain running throughout the song. Like the sonnets of Shakespeare, it furnishes the key to unlock the treasures of the poet’s heart. While sounding the depths of philosophical wisdom, this song stirs the tenderest chords of human heart and makes the most daring flights of lore-romance in the spiritual firmament. It was and is sung on all auspicious occasions in the Ashram.

Though Sri Ramana always declined to be drawn into a discussion of its diverse interpretations, he would sit up in a trance of ecstasy whenever it was sung. Just before Sri Ramana’s *Maha Nirvana*, this hymn was being sung in chorus by the devotees who assembled outside his room. Sri Ramana opened his eyes, looked at the direction from where the voices came, and then as he closed his eyes, tears of ecstasy gushed from their outer edges and he breathed his last. So this song into which Sri Ramana had breathed the essence of his Divine Spirit became appropriately the background music to his life’s finale, like the glow of mellow light around the Setting sun.

Next in chronological order comes ‘*Navamanimalai*’ (The Garland of Nine Gems). This is a collection of nine casual verses in various metres. Its underlying sentiment is also love and devotion to Arunachala. It explains at the outset the idea of ‘Achala Tandavam’ (motionless dance) of the Lord. He is static and dynamic at the same time. The glorious Source that absorbs and transcends both the aspects is this Arunachala. The verbal root-meaning of A-ru-na is also set forth. It means respectively either Sat-Chit-Ananda (Being-Knowledge-Bliss), or the Supreme Self-the individual Self-their identity, or That-Thou-Art. ‘Achala’ means the Great One. That is why the mere recollection of the name ‘Arunachala’ confers Mukti instantly. The rest of the poem is a call to complete self-surrender and a moving prayer for forgiveness of faults and for deliverance. It is impossible to ford the sea of samsara



and get up on the shore unless Arunachala, out of his more than maternal love, stretches forth His hand of Grace. This song is also autobiographical. It relates how Sri Ramana was born of virtuous Sundaram and Azhagu in sacred Tiruchuzhi and was rescued from the coils of Ignorance even in early years and raised by Arunachala to his own seat. The poem is in short, a paean of praise and thanksgiving.

The next hymn is *Arunachala Padikam* (The Ten Verses on Arunachala). It really consists of one invocatory verse and ten stanzas, all in the same metre. It observes the rule of ‘*Mukta-Pada-Grastam*’, that is to say: the last word of each verse is repeated as the first word of the next verse, so that the whole poem reads like a chain of ‘linked sweetness long drawn out’. It is also a devotional love lyric and is full of autobiographical interest.

Arunachala, the lover, has stolen the guileless singer in early youth for thinking of Him but once, and having drawn the beloved to His Feet and keeping her long like a frog amidst the lotus stalks, is slowly consuming her (ego). The singer surrenders to the will of her Lord and prays for completing the process of devouring and for changing the frog into a bee that tastes the honey of the lotus-blossom. The song concludes with a warning and an appeal. It warns the worldly-wise saying, “ Lo! I have newly discovered a magnet-mountain that attracts all beings who think of it even once, makes them still like itself and preys upon their sweet lives (egos). That magnet-mountain is Arunachala. So beware and keep off”.

At the same time, the singer makes a clarion call to all kindred spirits who have renounced the worldly life in quest of the means of deliverance. The singer shouts, “Here is the panacea, the sovereign remedy, the wonder-drug for all the distractions and ills of life. If you merely think of it but once, it cures you. It kills without killing. It kills the ego without killing the Self. Many have been thus saved like me. It is

none other than Arunachala. You, all afflicted beings, know this and be saved.”

The next and grandest hymn is *Arunachala Ashtakam* (The Eight Verses on Arunachala). Sri Ramana himself related how it was composed in the course of a walk round the sacred Hill. All of a sudden, the first word of the hymn flashed into his mind and with an irresistible urge composed itself into the first stanza. Then the last word of the stanza lingered in the mind and clamoured for further expansion into the second stanza. The same process was repeated in the other stanzas, and at the end of the eighth stanza the urge for expression automatically ceased. But the stanzas are of uniform metre and observe the rule of ‘*Mukta-pada-grastam*’ like the previous hymn.

This hymn is a masterpiece of philosophical poetry in which both thought and style reach their high water mark. For its superb symphony, it is a universal favourite among music-lovers. It is also autobiographical and reveals the mysterious association of Arunachala with Sri Ramana from childhood and the part played by Arunachala in his process of Self-Realisation. Arunachala is the Real Self that manifests Itself when the ego-mind traced back through Self-enquiry merges in its Source. This song is distinguished for the daring originality of its thought and imagery:

“To search for the essential Inner truth of Thyself (Arunachala) is like going round the earth to see the sky. It is like the sugar-doll diving to measure the depth of the ocean.”

“To quest for God elsewhere turning away from Thyself (Arunachala) is like searching for darkness with a light.”

“Those who fail to visualise the one, matchless, resplendent diamond of Arunachala are like the blind that cannot see the sun before them.”

“The mind that has contacted Thee (Arunachala) and is sparkling itself like a cut or polished gem wilt not need another light to kindle it, just as a sensitive plate exposed to the sun will not take on impressions afterwards.”

“A mysterious Sakti (Power) in Thee (Arunachala) which however is not apart from Thyself, illumines with the reflection of Thy pure Light the latent, subtle dark mists which then manifest *within* as thoughts whirling in the rolls of *Prarabdha* (Past Karma), and are projected *without* across the lens of the mind and the outgoing senses as the passing world-picture upon the unchanging screen of Thyself (Arunachala).”

“Whoso dives within for tracing the source of the I – thought and attains the seat of the Heart (Arunachala) becomes at once the sole Monarch of monarchs and transcends all in and out, vice and virtue, birth and death, happiness and misery, light and darkness and other dreamy dualities.”

“Just as the waters rising from the sea as vapour and coming down as rain, must flow back into the sea in spite of all obstacles, just as a bird soaring into the sky and fatigued, must needs return to the earth for rest, so every being must finally retrace its way to the Source and merge in Thee, Thou Ocean of Bliss, O Arunachala.” It will be seen that in the above passages the poet makes use of irony and of metaphors called from Nature and from arts and science such as photography and cinema. This is all the more remarkable as Sri Ramana had never handled a camera nor had he ever been to a cinema-show.

The last and the most famous hymn is the one entitled ‘Arunachala Pancharatnam’ (*Five Gems to Arunachala*). While the other four hymns were Tamil compositions, this one was composed by Sri Ramana in Sanskrit, at the request of Kavyakantha, to serve as an introduction to ‘Sri Ramana Gita’. It was later rendered into Tamil by the author himself. It has become the daily prayer of all devotees. These ‘Five Gems’ have been praised by Kavyakantha saying that they ‘contain the quintessence of the whole Vedanta, and though terse and brief are all-comprehensive like ‘Sutras’ (aphorisms).’

As Sri Ramana never studied Sanskrit, how he could compose this Sanskrit classic is a wonder which can only be explained on the ground that he had realised ‘THAT by

knowing which everything else is known.’ As to the Maharshis of yore, so too to Sri Ramana Maharshi, the usual order of thought and speech was reversed. Words flashed first, and their sense followed next. In their depiction of Arunachala as ‘*Sarvatma*’ (the Universal Self) these ‘five gems’ resemble the famous ‘*Dakshinamurti Ashtakam*’. The opening stanza invokes Arunachala as ‘Nectareous Ocean full of grace by whose splendour the entire Universe is engulfed’ and it prays to Him, the Supreme Soul, ‘to be the Sun for the full blossoming of the lotus-mind’.

The second stanza explains Arunachala as ‘Swaroopa’ (the Source) in whom ‘all this panorama arises ‘exists and dissolves’. It further explains how Arunachala manifests in the Heart as ‘I’ the Self and so is Himself named the Heart. The third stanza describes the path of ‘*Jnana*’ (Self-Enquiry) and how on knowing one’s Self one merges in Arunachala as the river in the ocean. The fourth stanza unfolds the path of Yoga (Meditation): ‘The Yogi with controlled breath and concentrated mind, meditating on Thee within, beholds in Thee O Arunachala”” Thy Light Transcendent”. The final stanza depicts both the paths of ‘*Bhakti*’ (Devotion) and ‘*Karma*’(Action). The devotee who with dedicated mind beholds Arunachala alone or the man of action whoever reverentially serves all as the form of Arunachala shines immersed in the Bliss of Arunachala. So this hymn within a brief compass is all-comprehensive and stands out as the most glorious monument of Sri Ramana’s relationship to Arunachala.

This mysterious relationship was most impressively demonstrated by the celestial phenomenon at the time of Sri Ramana’s *Maha Nirvana*. At that very moment, a brilliant light in the shape of a huge star emanated in the south-east corner of the horizon and trailing majestically across the sky, seemed to merge in the highest peak of Arunachala. This was witnessed by so many people outside. It was to all mortals an ocular, heavenly revelation of the Life-Light of Sri Ramana

ascending and merging in the Universal Light of the Supreme Self that is Arunachala. Indeed, Sri Ramana was Arunachala's Self in human shape incarnate; and Arunachala is Sri Ramana himself in mountain-mould. In essence, both Sri Ramana and Arunachala are one and the same, that is, the Supreme Self.

## 86. Saviour\*

Sometimes the Lord Himself appears as guru, as He did of yore in the form of Dakshinamurti and in our own age in the person of Sri Ramana, who too taught through silence. On one occasion, however, Bhagavan gave a mantra directly to a devotee. And this was as extraordinary as it was touching since the recipient was an 'untouchable' and illiterate!

Not daring to enter the Hall or speak to Bhagavan, this humble devotee had put a picture of Bhagavan on a string round his neck which he used to hold in his hand and gaze at while he circumambulated the Ashram. One day, as he neared the entrance gate of the Hall, he saw Bhagavan coming out and fell prostrate at His feet. Bhagavan stopped and the devotee prayed with tears in his eyes "Save me!" Bhagavan looked with great compassion on the poor man who obviously would not be able to meditate or follow a ritualistic path of worship, and uttered the words: "Go on saying, 'Siva, Siva'. That will save you."

As a rule, Bhagavan advised seekers to go beyond puja and *japa*, ritual and mantra, and to trace all back to the source. But on this occasion, he made a grand exception, and taught a simple mantra straight and clear. And what he taught was a mantra highly praised by masters, like Tirumular and Thayumanavar, as it spells out and stands for the oneness of 'Si' and 'va', of Brahman and *jiva*, of Being and Awareness.

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\* Sadhu Natanananda, *The Mountain Path*, April 1972.

## 87. The Term Hridaya

*Sri T.K. Sundaresa Iyer was one among the few who had the privilege of not being addressed by Bhagavan in honorific terms: He fondly addressed him as ‘Sundaresa’ or ‘Sundaram’. However, he was known popularly only as TKS in the Ashram. His erudition in Vedantic literature was deep; he was proficient in Sanskrit, Tamil and English. So, he aptly fitted in to act as an interpreter to Sri Bhagavan, though most of his time he spent in the Ashram office attending to correspondence. Of course, in this also he was blessed because he had to show the letters to Bhagavan and get hints from Him while answering certain letters...*

“**A** staunch devotee living in England, Harry Dickman was soaked in Sri Bhagavan’s teachings, though he could not have His darshan. He wrote asking for an explanation as to the term ‘*Hridayam*’ and its significance. I got from Bhagavan hints on how the reply should be formed. The following is the gist of the reply, which was approved by Bhagavan and sent to Harry Dickman:” – T.K. Sundaresa Iyer

Just as there is a cosmic centre from which the whole universe arises and has its being and functions with the power or the directing energy emanating therefrom, so also is there a centre within the frame of the physical body wherein we have our being. This centre in the human body is in no way different from the cosmic centre. It is this centre in us that is called the *Hridaya*, the seat of Pure Consciousness, realised as Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. This is really what we call the seat of God in us.

It is this *Hridaya* that is said to be different from the physical heart, regulating the blood circulation. The *Hridaya* has its being on the right side and is not commonly known or felt. The primary thought in us arising as ‘I,’ when traced

to its source, ends somewhere in us and this place, where all thoughts die, where the ego has vanished, is the *Hridaya*. From this centre is felt and enjoyed the Pure Consciousness.

*Hridaya* described as ‘the literal, actual, physical seat of the intuition of the Self’ has the meaning explained above. Perhaps the words ‘physical seat’ may create some confusion. What it really means is that there is a centre of Pure Consciousness in the physical body. It is related to the physical but is not itself physical.

The word *Hridaya* is a composite of *hrid* and *ayam* – “centre, this”. It is the centre on the right which we reach as a result of meditation. From the *Hridaya*, consciousness arises to the *sahasrara* through the *sushumna* and from there spreads out to all the parts of the body through the several ‘nadis’. Then alone we become conscious of the objects around us. Man, due to the illusion that these have real existence, experiences suffering, as he strays far away from his Self. The seat from where all these arise and manifest is the *Hridaya*.

Whether in sleep, joy, sorrow, fear or satisfaction, we return to this Heart and that is why we feel lost to all consciousness of things around. If by meditation or *Vichara* we attain to our centre, the *Hridaya*, and thus our real Self, we will enjoy unalloyed bliss.

In the course of tracing ourselves back to our source, when all thoughts have vanished, there arises a throb from the *Hridaya* on the right, manifesting as ‘*Aham*’ ‘*Aham*’. This is the sign that Pure Consciousness is beginning to reveal itself. But that is not the end in itself. Watch wherefrom this *sphurana* (throbbing) arises and wait attentively and continually for the revelation of the Self. Then comes the awareness, oneness of existence.

When we steady our breath, we feel the steadying of our thoughts. Then the thoughts turn inward and melt away at a point. Watching this point, where the thoughts vanish, will also help us to merge ourselves in the *Hridaya*.

## 88. Some Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi\*

Sometimes in life there is a clash between two competing obligations, especially if both seem to be equally important. At such times it is rather difficult to arrive at the right decision. It has been my experience that at such times our gracious Master leads us to the proper decision. I will give an example from my own life.

At one time I felt that my political duty as a Gandhian demanded that I should court arrest, but my domestic duties bade me otherwise. As I was eager to go to jail as part of the independence struggle, it pained me that, out of regard for my family, I was not able to do so. I found myself in a dilemma and I could not of my own accord see the way out. The situation was so unbearable for me that I had to turn to the Master for help and relief. I therefore set out for Tiruvannamalai.

After reaching there I went and sat in the holy presence of the Master. While I was sitting there I began to wonder how I should place my difficulty before him because I did not feel like broaching the subject verbally. I finally decided to pour forth my prayer from my heart in silence in the form of a plea for Sri Bhagavan to extend his benign help to me. I began to pray and while I concentrated on my mental plea I watched his radiant face and his sparkling eyes, which were full of love and kindness. And then, astonishingly, something like a miracle began to happen. Sri Bhagavan's face transformed itself into that of Mahatma Gandhiji, while his body remained the same. As I stared at it with awe and wonder, the two faces, those of Sri Bhagavan and Gandhiji, began to appear to me alternately in quick succession. I felt my heart filling with joy and yet at the same time I was wondering whether what I saw was real or not. I turned my eyes away from Sri Bhagavan and looked around me to see if others were seeing what I

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\* C.V. Yogi, *The Maharshi*, January 1994.



saw. Seeing no sign of wonder on their faces, I concluded that what I saw was a picture from my own imagination. I closed my eyes and sat quietly for some time. Then, as I began again to look at Sri Bhagavan's face, the vision immediately reappeared, but this time with a slight change. In addition to the two faces of Sri Bhagavan and Gandhiji, those of Krishna, Buddha, *Kabir*, Ramdas and a host of other saints began to show themselves in quick succession. Now all my doubts vanished and I began to enjoy this grand and divine show. The vision lasted about five minutes. My mind dropped all its worries and I found myself able to hand over my problem to the capable hands of the Master. Though he spoke no words to me, it came to pass that the problem was solved without infringing either of my two duties. In fact, both duties were fulfilled satisfactorily.

I had another vision of Sri Bhagavan in 1943. During my visit to Sri Ramanasramam that year, I visited the temple of Sri Arunachaleswara with my family and a friend who was a devotee from Madurai. This is the main temple in Tiruvannamalai, the same one which Sri Bhagavan stayed in when he first arrived here.

While we were walking through the spacious courtyards towards the sanctum sanctorum, I did not have any inkling of the wonderful experience I was to pass through when I finally saw the deity.

On reaching the innermost shrine we discovered that we were early, for the doors of the shrine had not been opened. We decided to wait there till someone came to unlock them. I leaned back against a pillar and began to think about Bhagavan's early life. Suddenly my thoughts started to materialise physically as scenes from his early life began to appear before my eyes as vividly as if I were watching a cinema film.

I saw very clearly Venkataraman writing the imposition in his uncle's house in Madurai. Leaving it aside, he sits bolt upright, closes his eyes and becomes absorbed in the

more congenial practice of Self-absorption. His elder brother Nagaswami is watching him and rebukes him for neglecting his lessons. Venkataraman then decides to leave the house. He takes three rupees from his brother's college fees and departs after leaving a short note. He reaches the railway station. He buys a ticket to Tindivanam, gets into the train and sits quietly in one corner. A moulvi who is discoursing to other passengers notices him and asks him where he is going...Scene by scene, I was enjoying this wonderful divine vision when the doors of the shrine opened and my vision was interrupted by the loud blowing of pipes and beating of drums. The people who were waiting with us stood up to get the Lord's darshan. I too mechanically stood up with the others. After this short interruption, my vision continued. Though the idol of Sri Arunachaleswara was before my eyes, I could clearly see Venkataraman getting out of the train at the Tiruvannamalai station. He then ran towards the temple. As he was coming nearer and nearer, the noisy music rose to a higher and higher pitch. Venkataraman entered the temple, ran to the shrine and embraced the lingam with both his hands. My feelings were ecstatic. My whole body experienced a divine thrill and tears of joy rolled down my cheeks. This state of sublime joy lasted a long time and was both indescribable and unforgettable.

One day an old lady came into the hall at Sri Ramanasramam. After prostrating to Sri Bhagavan she placed a slip of paper in his hands. I guessed that it contained a prayer or doubt of some kind because it was the custom of many devotees to offer their prayers or place their doubts before Sri Bhagavan in this manner. However, in this particular case, it turned out to be quite a different matter.

This old woman lived in town in a dilapidated temple and she needed money to repair it. With this purpose in mind she had got someone to prepare a draft of an appeal for funds. In order to collect the required amount more easily, she had hit upon the idea of having the appeal signed by eminent persons of the town. She had come to the ashram because she

wanted Sri Bhagavan's signature at the top of the appeal. This was the piece of paper which she had presented to him. Sri Bhagavan read it and then returned it to her without uttering a single word.

"My work will be done if you will only put your signature on this appeal," the old lady said, urging him to sign.

Sri Bhagavan replied by saying, "It is well known that I never sign anything." She would not accept his refusal. Repeatedly she pressed him to sign, but she could not make him change his decision.

Finally, Sri Bhagavan told her, "Yes, yes, you want me to sign your appeal, but how can one sign who has no name? What name will one sign?"

The old woman was puzzled. What did Sri Bhagavan mean by saying that he had no name? Was not his name Sri Ramana Maharshi? Since everyone knew him by that name, why could he not write these three words on her paper? Because she could not understand the significance of Sri Bhagavan's reply, she persisted in pleading with him to sign. Sri Bhagavan remained unmoved and kept silent. After some time, the old woman gave up her attempts and left the hall, without, of course, having obtained Sri Bhagavan's signature.

Sri Bhagavan's language was that of silence. The speech delivered through this medium was full of miraculous potency, as the following anecdote reveals.

When he was staying in Virupaksha Cave, a District Collector and a Deputy Collector came there for his darshan. After prostrating to Sri Bhagavan, the District Collector began to speak, narrating at length all the sadhanas he had done and all the spiritual literature he had read. At the end of his speech he confessed that in spite of all these activities peace was as far from him now as it had ever been.

As soon as he had finished, the Deputy Collector began to tell his own story, which was equally long. These two speeches took quite a long time to deliver, but Sri Bhagavan

did not interrupt them even once. He continued to remain in silence even after the speeches had ended.

The senior Collector gave up waiting for a reply and delivered yet another long speech. Sri Bhagavan listened in silence and continued to remain in silence when the speech was over.

The officer, not surprisingly, was a little put out by Sri Bhagavan's unresponsiveness. He said in an aggrieved tone of voice, "We have been speaking to you for a long time, but you don't open your mouth at all. Please tell us something. Anything, however brief, will do."

Sri Bhagavan finally spoke to them saying, "All this time I have been speaking in my own language. What can I do if you won't listen to it?"

The Collector was an intelligent man, well versed in spiritual matters. He caught the meaning of Sri Bhagavan's cryptic reply. Suddenly overpowered with devotion, he fell down at the feet of Sri Bhagavan and chanted a Sanskrit verse from Sankaracharya's *Sri Dakshinamurti Stotra*:

"Look at the wonder under the banyan tree! While the disciples are old and grey-haired, the teacher is a blooming youth. And though the Master's speech is simple silence, the doubts of the disciples are all resolved!"

Both of the visitors then abandoned their speeches and questions, preferring instead to sit before Sri Bhagavan in silent meditation. They got the peace they had come looking for and departed fully satisfied.

## 89. The Silence of Bhagavan\*

Just as with Dakshinamurti, that illustrious ancient Sage, the word ‘Silence’ is inextricably linked with the name of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. For those of Bhagavan’s devotees, who had the requisite depth and maturity, His Silence was all-in-all and meant much more than any words which were spoken. But for the vast majority of average seekers and devotees, the Silence of Masters such as Ramana Maharshi and Dakshinamurti, is something which is way beyond their comprehension; something very esoteric or mysterious. Just as a diamond is a precious jewel with numerous facets, which are not apparent to the naked eye, but are clearly seen under a magnifying glass, so the Silence of Bhagavan is a gem of the rarest and most precious kind, and this article sets out to magnify and reveal its many hidden dimensions, unknown to most seekers and devotees.

Firstly, the Silence of Bhagavan is explored from the standpoint of *Jnana* or knowledge. It is a basic truth that words or language are part and parcel of relativity or the realm of ‘maya’; a means of conveying or expressing things which are on the relative level. Language is a tool of the intellect which can operate only on the plane of ordinary understanding, and not on the plane of mystical experience. And it is the very aim of all mysticism or spirituality to make the seeker transcend his or her intellect or ordinary understanding, so that he or she can directly experience the Reality which is beyond all words. So, it is obvious that words are useful only to a certain extent. Words can point to the Truth but they cannot actually take seekers to the experience of that State, where words cannot reach. But Silence is much superior to words, in as much as Silence has the power to suck seekers into the Heart, the seat of Reality, where they effortlessly experience their true spiritual nature.

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\* A Parsi Devotee, *The Mountain Path*, July 1984.

Moreover, words also pose a potential danger which is very subtle, so subtle that most seekers can't even recognise it as a danger, viz. the trap of learning or intellectual knowledge. Words are only a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. The acquisition of mere knowledge without its practical application is of no spiritual value. The writer has found many instances of people who originally started out as seekers and ended up as pseudo-pundits or pseudo-scholars, with stuffed heads and empty hearts. Instead of using words as a map to reach the destination of Perfection, they fell victims to the lure of learning and were content to know everything under the Spiritual sun rather than to experience even a fraction of the truths pointed at by the words.

The great Masters are quite familiar with this very subtle trap of intellectual knowledge, and as with Bhagavan, they try to minimise the use of words as far as possible, so that their disciples or devotees may not fall into this trap. And they always try to steer their disciples and devotees away from this trap by invariably answering questions very briefly and also very directly, if at all they choose to speak. For instance, whenever Bhagavan was asked any knotty theoretical or philosophical questions, which were actually of no relevance to the questioner, He would either remain silent or in few words counter-question the questioner thus – “Who is asking these questions? Who wants to know all this? First find that out.”

This approach of Bhagavan was indeed most direct and effective but very few questioners could fully grasp its profound implications. When Bhagavan remained silent, it was not because He didn't want to answer the questions, but He knew that answering them wouldn't help the questioner practically. And if He answered five of them, in due course, another ten would arise, and if He finished answering those, still more would come up, and the questioning game would go on endlessly. Questions and answers exist only on the intellectual level and not on the plane of Reality or Spirit. His

Silence was aimed at stilling the questioning intellect, so that the Reality ever-present in the questioner's Heart was directly experienced at first-hand by the questioner, and in that State, all questioning would automatically cease.

Unknown to the seekers who sat at His feet, through the medium of Silence, Bhagavan was giving them a taste of His own exalted spiritual State. It was thus that we find some recorded instances of people who came to Bhagavan with long lists of questions. But after sitting in His presence for some time, the lists remained in their pockets and not a single question was asked. Indeed, it was impossible for them to ask any question at all, when through His all-powerful Silence Bhagavan had quietly elevated them from the ordinary intellectual level to the dimension of Pure Spirit, where there are neither questions nor answers.

When, in response to intricate philosophical questions, He counter-questioned the questioner, as already mentioned above, unknown to the questioners, that was a sure-fire device meant to draw them inwards into the Heart or Source and to put an end to their wandering in the mental maze of never-ending questions and answers. These counter-questions of Bhagavan were just a slight variation of His standard 'Who am I?' technique. If the questioner tried to find out who was asking the questions, who wanted to know all that then he or she would discover that all questions and the desire to know, originated from his or her apparent individuality or personality. And when the questioner persisted in tracing this elusive individuality or personality, it would slip back into its Source, the Heart, and with the disappearance of the phantom of individuality or personality, there would be no one left to ask any questions and all questioning would come to an end in the absence of the questioner.

Now, let us see another facet of the priceless jewel of Silence emanating from Bhagavan. As some readers may already know, Silence is one of the recognised ways of transmitting what is technically termed as Grace, or, in simpler

words, the Master's Love for His disciples and devotees. The way of Silence is the most mysterious and yet the most powerful way in which the Master's influence is directly transmitted to those who are with Him. The transmission through Silence is not so well-known as the other ways of look and speech and touch, as the way of Silence is possible only for Masters of the highest order, like Bhagavan and Dakshinamurti; those Masters whose so-called individuality or imperfect human nature is reduced to ashes, allowing their original perfect Divine nature to shine forth unobstructed.

As Silence transcends speech, it is actually impossible to describe the way of Silence through words. But, even then, an attempt is made here for the benefit of those who would like to know more on this point. In terms of power, the power of Silence is simply unequalled as compared to the other means of look and speech and touch. The Master just sits in silence and the disciple also does likewise. In the utter stillness of silence, the Master's perfect spiritual state is openly and fully manifest without any physical or mental obstructions or distractions. As the disciple attunes himself to the Master's Silence, an invisible direct connection is established between the Heart of the Master and the Heart of the disciple. Through this direct Heart-to-Heart channel, the Master's Love or Grace silently flows into the disciple's Heart, and depending upon the disciple's receptivity and spiritual ripeness, he or she is able to absorb more or less of it. The effect of this absorption is experienced as an immeasurably transcendent Peace and Bliss, and at this time, the disciple has an effortless taste of the Master's perfect spiritual State.

Now, finally, it is time to reveal the invisible factors which are responsible for the Silence of perfected Masters such as Bhagavan. But, please note that in this context, the word Silence is not just used in its restricted sense to mean silence in answer to questions, but Silence taken as a whole, in its entirety, as an integral part and parcel of the Master's total image. The first factor which forms the very basis of this



Silence is the inexpressible nature of mystical experience. By its very nature, mystical experience, especially Advaitic experience, transcends all relativity and all intellectual ideas and conceptions. So, how can words, which are within the realm of relativity and intellect, ever express the nature of such immeasurably transcendent experience?

In this connection, there is a well-known Upanishadic story which beautifully illustrates the truth stated above. Once, a man sent his elder and younger son to a spiritual preceptor for spiritual instruction. After the period of training was over, both the sons returned to their father's house. And their father asked them – "Well, my sons, now that you have mastered our ancient spiritual heritage, I would like to know from both of you as to the nature of Brahman, the ultimate Reality". The elder son was the first to answer his father, and in reply he quoted extensively from various scriptures to describe the nature of Brahman. After he had finished speaking, the father turned to his younger son. This boy just stood quietly in front of his father and didn't utter even a single word, as if he was struck dumb. The father rejoiced to see the eloquent silence of his younger son and said to him, "Well done, my son! Through your silence you have most perfectly conveyed the nature of the experience of that transcendent Reality which is beyond all words and all descriptions. Your brother's words show that he has intellectually understood but not experienced, whereas your silence shows that you have truly experienced That."

The other factor which is responsible for the Silence of the great Masters is so hidden that it is almost unknown and unmentioned anywhere in mystical literature. This factor is the 'awakening' of the Heart. The Heart is the seat of Reality as well as the fountainhead of Love, and Love is an integral aspect of Reality, together with Bliss and Peace. With the onset of the state known as Realisation or Enlightenment, the Heart opens up, so to say, and is flooded with a torrent of an all-encompassing cosmic or universal Love. There is an old saying that when the Heart is full, the tongue is still, and,

with the flooding of the Heart, the tongue is actually stilled. The genuine Master's Love is too deep for words and He can express It only through Silence. Thus, Silence is the language of Reality as well as the language of the Heart, and Heart is but another name for Reality.

For most of His devotees, Bhagavan was just a silent *jnani*, on the very summit of spiritual achievement, radiating Peace, Power and Wisdom all around. That was His outer image. But His hidden inner image was something else and it was seen by only a few devotees, who were in close communion with Him, not through words, but through Silence, at the inner Heart-to-Heart level. These devotees knew Bhagavan as the very Ocean of Love and saw His Silence as the most perfect expression of That unfathomable Love. And those handful of devotees who were gifted with deeper insight perceived Bhagavan as the embodiment of Arunachala in human form, and saw in Bhagavan's Silence, the Silence of Arunachala, whom Bhagavan has addressed in 'The Marital Garland of Letters' as 'Love Itself!'

*N.B.*

The silent communion of Love between Master and devotee is based on an inner Heart-to-Heart or Spirit-to-Spirit contact and not on an outer body-to-body relationship. Hence, the presence or absence of the Master's body doesn't make any difference to this silent communion. And so the devotees of today, who never saw Bhagavan in His physical form still feel the same silent Love enfolding them, and more so especially when they are at Ramanasramam at Arunachala.

## 90. Ramana Sat-Chit-Ananda Guru\*

Whenever there are earnest seekers God manifests in human form to guide and bestow grace upon them. The faceless *Sat-Chit-Ananda* or the original name ‘I am’ has been named differently through the ages. In the Vedas it has been named ‘Indra-Varuna’ or ‘Indragni’. In the puranas it was ‘Lakshminarayan’ or ‘Siva-Parvati’. Sri Ramachandra called it ‘Maheswar’ and devotees of Rama, ‘Rama-Sita’. Jesus called it ‘Father’ and Christians, ‘Jesus the Christ.’ Sri Ramana Maharshi identified it as ‘Sri Arunachala Ramana’, and his devotees, as ‘Sri Arunachala Ramana’. One is the eternal aspect and the other is the phenomenal aspect of one and the same thing.

What can be said about him whose voice is the voicelessness or *mouna*? “The sun is ever there; to see it you have only to turn towards it”. And man inevitably turns towards the spiritual Sun. Somewhere in his evolution he has to turn from the circumference to the centre and end his dizzy circumambulation round his ego-self. Somewhere there is the question, “Who is this ‘I’? What is its nature? And who seems to suffer through all these changes yet remains throughout?” A quest is launched upon, and again it is inevitable that man must pursue the quest to the last because there lies his supreme achievement and eternal bliss. “Though the ‘I’ is always experienced, yet one’s attention has to be drawn to it. Then only the knowledge dawns”. Suitable guides can be found on the path. One such is Ramana *Sadguru*.

We, the latter day devotees were not fortunate enough to be in his physical presence and yet not so unfortunate as to miss him completely. For us he is the same all the time, the perennial source of inspiration, guidance and grace. Many will bear witness that even the physical manifestation was not withheld after his death to devout seekers, if earnestly desired.

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\* Dr. Purnima Sircar in *Ramana Smriti*

What is impossible for him who is beyond any limitation – the ever-present guru?

“Everyone has to come to Arunachala”, said he. Whichever path may be followed it ends in ‘I’ and the investigation of the nature of the ‘I-thought’. Its elimination is the sadhaka’s hardest task. But what could be easier than to fall back on the experiencer and to ask oneself who perceives and who sees with each experience? All methods of sadhana lead to one-pointedness of the mind; thus distraction or the *vikshepa* of the mind may be overcome, but the veiling or the *avarana* might still remain. If blankness prevails, unless one persists with the question, “To whom is the blankness? Who am I?” and holds a receptive attitude with absolute surrender for the grace to prevail, the veiling is not removed. One day the door is opened and the meditator is merged in the ever-present, all-pervading peace. The peace is so profound and all absorbing that the sadhaka cannot give up till it is constant and abiding. A true sadhana begins and his inner monitor will guide him till that state is reached. “My reward consists in your permanent unbroken bliss. Do not slip away from it”, says the guru to a devotee in *Kaivalya Navaneeta*. This is endless Ramana-Consciousness.

Truth is so simple that it is hard to grasp. Sri Bhagavan said, “Who does not know that he exists? Everyone is Self-realised, only he does not know”. Who will believe that Self-realisation is so simple a process? No elaborate rite and ritual, no asana and pranayama, no dispute and dissertation, only turn the mind to its source. Ego is not boosted, not fed, but simply dissolved in this process. Indeed, Ramana’s teaching is hard for the confusion-ridden, samskara-bound mind; only those who have already exhausted them can comprehend it. But in the spiritual world intensity is counted and not numbers, and the few are sufficient for our ever-shining guru.

Sri Bhagavan says, “Ego in its purity is experience in intervals between two states or two thoughts. . . Realise this interval with conviction gained by study of the three states

(waking, dream and deep sleep). Just like the screen in the cinema, the Self is ever there, no matter what the time or the picture of the phenomena are. But we do not realise because our outlook is objective and not subjective. You attach too much importance to the body. In deep sleep there was no world, no ego and no trouble. Something wakes up from that happy state and says ‘I’. To that ego the world appears. Our mistake lies in our searching in the wrong place”. His dispassion towards his body during his last illness, “Where is pain if there is no mind”? – is the same detachment he had throughout his life. The *Sat-Chit-Ananda* Self and the body without the intermediary ego-self and the reflecting media of *samaskaras* – such is *Ramana Chaitayna Guru*.

Ramana removes the confusion between *manolaya* and *manonasa*, between *kevala nirvikalpa* and *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*. The wrong idea that a man will be a log or a stone after the dawn of wisdom is dispelled categorically. “If everybody does *sadhana*, who will plough the field and sow the seed”? is the fear that assails so many and keeps them away from the quest. “The physical body will do whatever work it has come for, and the body is bound by the *prarabdha*, not your mind”, he assures us. And then Sri Bhagavan, through his teachings and by living among us for so long in *sahaja samadhi* has set an outstanding example as to how a *jnani* works and lives without feeling the burden of it. “Who is there to think about it”? was his reply to the devotees who pleaded with him to cure himself. An example of complete surrender to the higher power, by Ramana, ever-compassionate guru.

The profound *mouna* that pervaded his holy presence not only influenced and inspired whoever came under its spell, but drew mature minds from all over the world to this spiritual centre. And it shall continue to draw such competent ones like a magnet. To understand this silence, it must be experienced. In this age of unrestrained gibbering, lecturing and preaching, who could have imagined the influence of *mouna* upon the human mind? What transformation is brought

about by turning the minds of innumerable devotees to the source by the peace that emanates from his profound *mouna*. “The highest form of grace is silence. It is also the highest *upadesa*”, said the ever blissful Guru Ramana.

Ramana’s Self comprises all and blesses all. Any attempt on our part to extol him is like worshipping the sun with an oil lamp. He consoled his devotees, “I am not going away, where can I go? I am here”. So we are always at the feet of Arunachala Ramana. To that grace personified, peace profound, the eternal *Sadguru*, our heartfelt reverence and prostrations.

## 91. Universal Love and Equality\*

Sri Ramana’s great and central teaching was, as is widely known today, “Know Thyself”, by enquiring within yourself ‘Who am I?’. Next only to this is another great precept of his, which I have rarely heard him propound by word of mouth but which he taught every moment of his life by his shining example, by the way he led his simple and unique life also unostentatiously in the midst of all of us. Even the most casual visitor or superficial observer in Sri Ramanasramam could not have failed to observe with what perfect equality and impartial love Bhagavan received all those who visited him. Hundreds daily and on some occasions such as the *Jayanti* and *Mahapuja* days at the Ashram or the Deepam festival at Tiruvannamalai, thousands would visit him. And towards all, rich and poor, high and low, the learned and the ignorant, the devout and the doubting or even the scoffing, men, women and children Bhagavan showed the same benign and gracious disposition.

One could perceive no difference at all in the way he treated the numerous visitors. That is not all. Even animals,

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\* Devaraja Mudaliar, *The Call Divine*, October 1952.

cows, dogs, deer, peacocks, monkeys, squirrels, tiger cubs, snakes, birds, were all regarded and treated no different from men, with the same unfailing tenderness and love which he showed to his devotees. I have never known Bhagavan refer to any animal as ‘it’, as we usually do in our Indian vernaculars implying thereby an inferiority in them compared with the humans to whom we refer as he or she as the case may be. Each will be referred by Bhagavan only as he or she. Neither in this nor in any other conduct of his towards all these would it have been possible for the most supercilious of observant to detect any pose or affectation or ostentation. It came to him so naturally, so spontaneously, to treat all, human and animals alike with the same love and equality, because all the time he was not looking at the outer covering or garment of flesh; which is what anybody is, but only at the dweller within, the soul inhabiting the body either in man or animal.

Volumes could be written if only all the instances are remembered and recorded in which Bhagavan unmistakably manifested by his action the extreme equality or *samathva* which he felt at heart for all forms of life. I shall only give here a few illustrations out of many that could be produced by devotees with a little effort of their memory.

Squirrels, we noticed, preferred cashew nuts to all other feed. At one time the Ashram management felt that the cashew nuts available in their stores should not be wasted on squirrels, but should rather be reserved for the delectation of men. Bhagavan could not tolerate such a view and showed by his words and conduct, unmistakably and yet most gently and without offending anybody holding a contrary opinion, that in his Ashram no such preference for man should be shown.

Once when a monkey tried to bring her new born baby to Bhagavan, through a window near Bhagavan’s couch and the attendants nearby were preventing the monkey from entering the hall, Bhagavan chided them as follows ‘Don’t you all bring your new born babies to me. She wants to do the same. Why should you prevent her? Bhagavan could see the bhakti

or love in the monkey's soul was no less intense than in the man's soul and the rest did not at all matter. Once when the Ashram wanted to celebrate the anniversary of our Indian Independence and was planning a feast therefor, Bhagavan intervened and said, "What about our friends, the monkeys? They should not be forgotten, but should also be provided with a feast." And the same was arranged.

In his Virupaksha Cave-days monkeys had great access to Bhagavan and enjoyed many privileges in his presence. Bhagavan would sometimes tell his attendants when they were harsh with the monkeys and trying to chase them away from the precincts of the hall, "You have come now. You must have seen them in those days. They had sway then." Even if they entered the hall and snatched away fruits, Bhagavan would always take the part of the monkey and tell his attendants, "Just as it is your duty to look after the fruits, it is their duty to grab them. So, they have only done their duty." The way Bhagavan treated the cow Lakshmi in particular and the way in which that cow also behaved would shatter once for all our pet notions that in the spiritual sphere we are superior to animals.

Let us turn now to another aspect of the *samatva* or equality taught to us by Bhagavan. He would never tolerate even for a single moment any preferential treatment being accorded to him in any respect. In the dining hall nothing could be served to him which was not served to all who were sitting with him. Not only that, if he suspected that he had been given a slightly bigger helping of any dish than the others, Bhagavan would flare up and the server's condition would be pitiable. He would say, "They want to honour me by this! Nothing can disgrace me more. One feels like dying out of sheer shame for such acts."

He would not allow the electric fan near him to run unless all people in the hall could have the like amenity. Even when his health was below par and doctors and others pressed him to take special diet, he would not consent to it. I have myself



pleaded several times before him only to receive the reply “If it is good for me, it is good for all.” Once when a devotee got Chyavanaprash specially made for Bhagavan and brought it with him all the way from Lucknow, I believe, and we all added our prayers to his and induced Bhagavan to take it, he took it for a day or two and then ordered it should be distributed to all along with him at breakfast.

The way in which Bhagavan by his example tried to instill the lesson of *Samatva* or universal love and equality into all of us would take too long to narrate in detail. I shall therefore restrain myself and end with giving only one more instance of his unique *samatva*.

One afternoon, three Europeans, two ladies and a gentleman if I remember right, friends of D.S. Sastri came and sat in the Old Hall. Bhagavan was seated on his couch facing west and the ladies were sitting along with Srimati Nagamma at a little distance from Bhagavan’s feet leaning on the Northern wall and facing south. One of the European ladies, unaccustomed as she was to squatting on the floor like us, stretched out her legs in front of her. Some attendant of Bhagavan noticed this and made a sign to her to retract her legs. She did so at once. She came there specially to pay her respects to Bhagavan and now she felt that, though unwittingly, yet nevertheless unmistakably, she has shown disrespect to Bhagavan. She felt for this so keenly that I believe tears gathered in her eyes.

Bhagavan was greatly annoyed at the conduct of his attendant and chided him and even asked the lady to sit as before, telling her it was right in her case as she was not accustomed to squat on the floor. But the poor lady could never again be persuaded to stretch out her legs. Then Bhagavan punished us all as follows. He had been sitting on his couch with his legs stretched out before him. He drew in his legs now and folded them in the *padmasana* posture. This was a painful thing for him to do as he was then having rheumatic pains all over the body and especially at the knee-joints. And

however much we pleaded and requested him not to take the misguided act of the attendant so seriously, we could not succeed in persuading Bhagavan all that day and even till the end of the next day, to stretch forth his legs again. If it is a rule, it is a rule for all: ‘I cannot be an exception’. That will give readers an example of the *samatva* Bhagavan lived and taught by example every moment of his life.

Saint Thayumanavar sang, ‘How can I understand you, I that have not learnt to regard all forms of life as your forms’. Exactly the same was Bhagavan’s teaching. There is nothing but the Self or Brahman and all this is Brahman according to the Upanishads. The late Sivaprakasam Pillai, one of the earliest of Bhagavan’s disciples has recorded that Bhagavan taught him ‘There is nothing you need to give me, enough if you get rid of all differences and also know giving to others is giving to yourself, for in truth who are you (i.e., are you different from others).’

But however lengthily I might write and whatever number of instances and illustrations I might give, readers could get only a vague, hazy and a very inadequate idea of the unique *Samatva*, universal love and equality that flowed towards all, men and animals alike from Bhagavan without any conscious effort on his part, so naturally, so spontaneously and so impartially. All might not have been able to benefit in the same way or degree by His love and Grace, due to inequalities in their capacities to imbibe His grace. But it was there, always pouring, on all alike. The ideal of equality, so widely taught by all great men and religions, was I believe nowhere more actively lived and brilliantly illustrated than in the life of the great Seer we knew as Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

## 92. An American Perspective\*

Over the decades Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings have slowly seeped into the awareness of seekers in North America. Though his teachings appear to be well known, valued for their directness, purity and simplicity, the continued presence and power of the messenger, the Maharshi, remains yet to be discovered or understood to any great extent.

A small number of Americans, upon reading Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*, did venture to make the voyage to India and visit the Sage in his Ashram. None returned with the ideal of spreading the Master's teachings or setting up an institution dedicated to him.

It was not until January 1961, when Bhagawat Singh (known also as Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat), on an extended visit to India from the USA, came to Sri Ramanasramam and Arthur Osborne planted the seed, suggesting that when he returned to America he might start weekly meetings in the name of Bhagavan. Bhakta Bhagawat returned in 1963, but it was not until 1965 that the weekly meetings began. Before long a room was rented for daily meetings and in 1966 the group was incorporated as Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. This appears to be the first organized effort in the name of the Maharshi in North America.

There was a slow, but steady, growth of interest in the years that followed. The Maharshi never told us to go out and spread his teachings to the world, but rather to go inward and realise their truth. With this ideal prevailing, Arunachala Ashrama was not inclined to take a firm outward step to expand its activities. Nevertheless, this ideal did attract – and still does attract – a core of serious sadhakas who realise that to experience the Self, as taught by the Maharshi, is the sole purpose of human existence.

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\* Dennis Hartel, *The Mountain Path*, April 2003.

For many devotees of the Maharshi in North America their spiritual aspirations and practice are a private affair. They shun organisations. This is but natural since Sri Bhagavan bequeathed to us a path that can be followed unseen amidst the bustle of society. It is, after all, an inner journey, which we alone must take.

There will always be some who wish to gain inspiration and support from like-minded seekers, following the path laid down by the Sage, or to serve him, by serving his devotees in an ashram where they may more easily harmonize their inner aspirations with their outer activities. For these aspirants an ashram dedicated to the Guru serves a definite purpose. These ashrams are centers of distribution where what the Sage has given to mankind is passed on to sincere seekers. Sri Ramanasramam in India serves that purpose, and has the distinction of being the one place on earth where the perpetual presence and guidance of the Master is most felt.

In North America, during the last ten or fifteen years, we have seen a considerable increase of interest in Sri Ramana, not only as the teacher, but also as the Guru. With a greater number of books, videos and CDs published and distributed, organisations forming and teachers traversing the country training students in Self-enquiry, more interest in Sri Ramana Maharshi has been generated.

Also, the recent, large wave of Indian nationals, especially from South India into the North American society has brought many serious devotees to our shores. This has resulted in greater interest in the expression of devotion to Sri Ramana Maharshi and also a genuine sincerity to practise the teachings while living in society. Ironically, many of these Indians comment that since coming to America, or Canada, they find better opportunities and a more conducive environment to live a spiritual life than they did in India. It is only in North America that their spiritual interest blossomed, they say. These same Indians on investigating into Sri Ramana Maharshi while abroad find little common ground with

the Western teachers and groups that profess Sri Ramana's teachings but have limited traditional Indian understanding or sympathy to the path of Surrender and Devotion. Indians appear to have an inherent understanding of the synthesis of Devotion and Knowledge espoused by Sri Bhagavan, and have difficulty equating seminars, lectures and workshops with a sincere spiritual practice that they believe to be essential for the devotee. A number of them have made the Maharshi the guide and goal of their lives and hold Ramana Satsangs in their homes where they recite the Master's compositions, read his teachings and meditate.

So what is the future of Sri Ramana Maharshi in the West? If asked, the Maharshi would most probably assert, "Future? Where is the future? There is only the present."

Still, there is little doubt that Sri Ramana Maharshi's name and teachings will continue to grow at a steady pace, though we cannot say whether this pace will accelerate at some point and take the form of an organized movement. First of all, his teachings leave little room for a formal ritual to hold a religious movement together. Also, there exists no scope for a successor to the Maharshi, nor has there been an organisation formed with ordained teachers. Moreover, his teachings stress an intense, inner sadhana, which the masses are unlikely, or incapable, to attempt.

But there is one thing, the Living Guru. If the continued guidance and grace comes to be understood and experienced by a growing number of aspirants, it could possibly, at some point, create an avalanche of interest. Furthermore, during the last few centuries there may not have lived a spiritual personality whose teachings were so universal and so thoroughly rational, direct and devoid of any sectarian roots or overtones, and whose life demonstrated the teachings so completely as the Sage of Arunachala. All these elements form a potential foundation for raising the recognition of the Maharshi from the foremost Sage of the 20th Century to a dominant influence upon the hearts and minds of millions of

seekers for centuries to come. Whether this will happen – or can happen – we cannot say. But what we do know is that the spiritual force released to the world during Sri Ramana Maharshi’s physical existence is definitely gaining momentum and will continue well beyond our generation.

Two thousand years ago a Guru lived. He was crucified, and yet survived to ascend from the earth. Society worships him as a saviour, one who taught the way to salvation and can grant it, even today. Could it happen in the case of a quiet ascetic who lived at the foot of an obscure holy hill in South India? Is that hill still obscure now in the year 2003? Visit it on a full-moon night and see for yourself. Anything is possible.

### **93. With Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi\***

#### **My Divine Call**

**I**n 1939, at the age of twenty, I left my home town of Gurpur in Karnataka and went to the nearby city of Mangalore on the west coast to pursue my higher education. There, in my hostel, I came across a pictorial biography of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi that was being circulated among the students. The book simply stunned me. My immediate reaction was to think, “A Maharshi living in India now! I must go and offer myself at his feet.”

From that point onwards I became very restless of mind. I was continually planning to run away from Mangalore to Tiruvannamalai to stay with the holy and enlightened Maharshi and to be guided by him on the path of spiritual illumination. I was so gripped by this one thought that any other concerns about my further education, or need to take permission from my parents, did not even cross my mind. It just flashed from

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\* Swami Damodarananda, *Mountain Path*, October 2009.

within that, by the grace of God, I had the opportunity to be with a sage of *atma-saksatkar* (self-realisation). I felt that at all costs I must go to him and be at his feet to be guided on the spiritual path, that being the only purpose of life.

The plan for every person's life is based on tendencies carried forward from previous lives. Generally, it starts getting fleshed out during late adolescence. The force of some past noble tendencies must have given my life this sudden turn.

### **Divine Guidance**

I told the manager of my hostel that I was leaving, and booked a ticket to Tiruvannamalai. A few days later I was sitting in the corner of a compartment on the Madras Mail. It so happened that in that same compartment an elderly brahmin gentleman was travelling with his family. After sharing food among themselves, the head of the family turned to me and asked where I was going. He was surprised to learn that such a young student as myself was going to visit the great sage in Ramanasramam. During our conversation he kindly advised me to get down from the train at about midnight at Villupuram station, and then take the train from there to Tiruvannamalai. Being overenthusiastic and inexperienced in travel, I had bought a ticket to Tiruvannamalai on the Madras Mail which goes all the way from the west to the east coast, without realising that I needed to change trains for Tiruvannamalai in the middle of the journey. His advice was a God-send. Being so preoccupied with my final objective, I would have missed the connecting train. I considered it to be the Lord's grace guiding me to my divine destination.

### **Arunachala and Arunachaleswara**

About midnight I got down at the Villupuram station and walked across the platform to where the train for Tiruvannamalai was standing. After a while the train started moving. At dawn from a great distance I was able to see between high rising temple walls, the imposing *gopuram*

towers of the temple of Arunachaleswara that faced outwards to the four directions. The temple was situated on the site where Lord Siva is said to have manifested himself in the form of a holy lingam nestling with Sakti at the foot of Mount Arunachala.

In most Hindu temples the Supreme Universal Divine Consciousness, *sat-chit-ananda*, is understood to be one with *parasakti*, the inscrutable Divine Power. The Supreme Divine Consciousness co-exists eternally with this Supreme Power which projects beginningless and endless universal systems, again and again, through the processes of evolution and involution. In other temples, this same truth is represented as a pair of male and female deities, such as *Mahakali* dancing eternally on *Mahakala*; the latter understood to be ever-absorbed in divine samadhi.

Within the great Indian temple culture are hidden eternal spiritual truths. Unfortunately, most of these truths are buried deep under a thick age-old crust of ritualistic tradition. Once in a while, however, for the sake of thirsty, seeking souls, a great spiritual giant – a masterly acharya, a devoted Mira, a Tulsi Dasa, or a Ramakrishna – blossoms within society as an ideal model of spiritual life. Swami Vivekananda characterises the appearance of such ones thus: *nirgacchati jagajjalat pinjaradiva kesari* (He bursts forth from the meshes of worldly confinement like a lion out of its cage). Sri Ramana was clearly one such spiritual giant.

### **Darshan and Beaming Grace**

After travelling throughout the night and all the following morning without eating any food, I reached Tiruvannamalai railway station about midday. Outside the railway station I found a tonga (horse carriage) and reached Sri Ramanasramam about 2 pm. Before going into the ashram I gave away my extra clothes and money to the *tonga-wallah*. He then took me around the buildings and showed me the hall where Sri Ramana Maharshi could be found. I took my bath at the



Mother's temple tank, and then went straight to the small hall where the sage was seated.

Having offered Sri Bhagavan my pranams, I sat myself down with my back against a wall as I was very tired after fasting and travelling since the previous day. However, as soon as I had done this, Maharshi gazed directly at me with unblinking, wide open eyes. I also looked into his eyes with all humility and wonder. In this way, both of us continued to stare into each other's eyes for a considerable time. While this was happening I felt ecstatic: Sri Bhagavan was showering his grace upon me. By his mere gaze it seemed as if the Maharshi was establishing me once and for all in spiritual life, despite all its trials and tribulations. Perhaps he intuitively saw my spiritual destiny. About five minutes later his eyes half closed as he went into introspective communion with the Self. I later learnt that it was quite common for Maharshi to remain in such states of divine absorption throughout the day and night. When one abides naturally in tune with the peace and bliss of the Supreme, it is known as *sahaja samadhi*: "Strange, the disciples under the banyan tree were all aged people and the Guru was young; he taught them by keeping silence, and the doubts of the disciples were all cleared up." (Sankaracarya, *Dakshinamurti Stotra* 12).

### **Staying in the Ashram**

After a while, some *ashramites* began to distribute pieces of fruit in leaf cups to the devotees who were seated in the hall. I took my leave from Sri Ramana, and then with my share of fruit in hand, slowly entered the passageway between the hall and the kitchen. Near the kitchen Sri Ramana's brother, Swami Niranjananandaji, the *sarvadhikari* (manager) of the ashram, was standing with a few mothers (*ammās*) who were helping with the cooking. I told them of my desire to stay in the ashram and lead a spiritual life. After some discussion they agreed to let me stay.

I was told that there had been a young man like me in the ashram earlier, who had had a little spiritual inclination. Having stayed for a while it seems that doubts arose in his mind regarding whether he should remain in the ashram. So he approached Sri Ramana and asked him whether it was best for him to stay, or else go home so he could serve his parents. Sri Ramana told him that if he felt that staying in the ashram to pursue spiritual ideals was the right thing to do, then he should do that. Otherwise, if he felt that returning home to be with his family and serve his parents was better, then he should pursue that course in life. Thus, Sri Ramana allowed the youth to follow his own preferences as dictated by his past karma, or tendencies inherited from previous births. The youth returned home, the pull towards family life evidently being the strongest.

That night I slept on a veranda, the weather being hot. Others were also spread out here and there in different areas of the ashram.

### **Sri Bhagavan Watching with a Smile**

I was asked to help in the kitchen. My daily duties mostly consisted of bringing firewood to the kitchen from the storehouse, boiling the milk that had been brought from the *gosala* (dairy) and rinsing any remaining sand or mud off enormous kitchen vessels after they had been washed by the salaried helpers. At that time the ashram was slowly getting built as donations came in. The kitchen was made of mud walls with large openings for ventilation. The monkeys of the neighbourhood would peep in and, if they saw an opportunity, they would enter the kitchen through the openings to eat whatever food was available. So after lunch when the *sevika* mothers (that is, elderly ladies) who did the cooking, retired to rest, one of my duties was to guard the kitchen with a stick and drive the monkeys away.

Bhagavan Ramana used to mostly sit or recline on his sofa in a big hall throughout the day except when he had to

go out to answer the call of nature. It so happened that the place where I did most of my work was in a passageway near the well, through which Bhagavan would walk to the bathroom. One day, I was busy washing the big vessels, unbeknown to me, Bhagavan – as usual, wearing his loincloth – was standing a short distance away with a small towel under his arm, holding a little water pot in one hand and his walking stick in the other. Suddenly I looked up and had his smiling darshan. I quickly stepped aside and requested that he proceed through the passageway. Still beaming at me, he indicated that it was of no concern, and asked me to continue my seva (service). I quickly made way and again requested him to continue. It was only then that he approached a few steps closer and slowly went on his way. It struck me how humble, egoless and self-effacing the great sage was.

### **Grinding Chutney with Sri Bhagavan**

One morning at about 4 a.m. I was summoned to the kitchen. To my surprise, when I entered the kitchen veranda I saw Sri Bhagavan in his loincloth sitting near the chutney grinding stone. A few other people were also sitting nearby. I began to grind the coconut scrapings and he helped me by pushing in the overflowing ingredients. At the same time, he was busy putting salt, chillies and other things in the chutney to make it tasty. When the grinding was over he placed all the contents in a vessel. Then he went into the kitchen and prepared the seasoning in a big spoon with oil, mustard and dry chillies. When it was boiling, he brought it from the kitchen to the veranda where the chutney was being prepared. Then he began pouring the seasoning over the chutney and mixed it well.

### **A Sweet Little Joke**

When the chutney was ready, Bhagavan distributed a little among the four or five people who were sitting there. Then he lifted his face up and from above dropped a bit of

the chutney into his mouth without his fingers touching his mouth. (This healthy principle of not contaminating food prepared in the kitchen with one's saliva is followed even now in India among Hindu families.) As the devotees were tasting the chutney, Sri Bhagavan asked them how they liked it. Out of reverence they all kept quiet to signify approval. Then Sri Bhagavan smiled and quipped in Tamil, "Is the chutney asking for idlis?" Everyone enjoyed the joke and smiled. The group of *ashramites* then dispersed and the chutney was taken to the kitchen to be served with idlis when the morning visitors arrived.

### **Service at the Vegetable Cutting Room**

Bhagavan next entered the vegetable cutting room where a kitchen assistant was cutting vegetables for the lunch that was to be served to the *ashramites* and visiting devotees. Bhagavan began assisting there also. He sat cross-legged and cut up vegetables with the utmost attention. I noticed that almost all the vegetable pieces he cut were exactly of the same size. From this I learnt the lesson that whatever action one performs should be done with attentiveness and energy, for every job is worship of the Lord.

### **General Routine of the Ashram**

As I remember it, during those days the general routine was somewhat like this. Early in the morning at about 4 a.m. a few devotees would gather in the hall for prayer and meditation. On one such occasion, a devotee, a Mrs. Kamakshi, entered the hall, offered her pranams to Sri Bhagavan and then got up. Sri Bhagavan called her over and showed her a small strip of paper. On it he had written, "Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya." He told her to chant it always. (She reportedly did so throughout her life.) As dawn approached, the *Veda Patasala acharyas* (teachers at the ashram's Vedic school) would bring their students to chant important Vedic mantras such as the shanti mantras, *Purusa Sukta* and Narayana

Sukta. Then bhajans (devotional songs) would be sung by the devotees in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and other languages. All the while, Sri Bhagavan would remain seated on his sofa with half-closed eyes absorbed in the Self. When the singing was over, all the devotees would sit quietly and meditate for a while. We would then disperse and attend to our morning duties. About 7:30 a.m. of the *ashramites*, guests and others would all assemble in the courtyard outside the dining hall for the breakfast of idlis and chutney. After breakfast non-resident visitors would begin to arrive to offer their pranams to Sri Bhagavan in the hall where he would be sitting or reclining on his cot sofa.

Sometimes the hall would fill up. Mostly, the visitors would stay quiet, happy to just enjoy being in the presence of the great brahmavit (knower of Brahman) sitting before them ever attuned to the Divine Peace and Bliss within him. In that spiritually surcharged hall filled with holy vibrations many had their inner, personal doubts resolved without ever having to verbalise them.

Once when I was a little free from my kitchen duties, I went to sit near Bhagavan in the hall at about 11:00 a.m. Some ladies visiting from a university in the state of Karnataka were talking with him. While answering one of their questions on silence, I heard him say, “*Maunam* [holy silence] is not just keeping quiet without talking. Holding one thought alone is considered to be the real *maunam*.” I would visit the holy hall at every opportunity to gather such pearls of wisdom.

On one occasion I witnessed a bare-chested brahmin standing for a long time before Bhagavan with folded hands. Perhaps Bhagavan knew him, for he seemed to ignore him. Then some other devotee entered the hall and began walking towards Bhagavan. As soon as Bhagavan saw this particular individual he began speaking to him with great joy. Thus, during these visiting hours we could see Sri Bhagavan’s various moods. No doubt he knew the devotees’ inner attitudes.

All guests were offered lunch with Bhagavan, then there was a period of rest. Later, darshan continued in the afternoon. From about 4:00 p.m., I had the seva duty of grinding soaked rice and dhal for the next morning's idlis. One devoted old lady used to help me by pushing in the overflowing, semi-liquid dough with her right hand. As soon as I was free from this service, I would return to the hall to enjoy Bhagavan's darshan. One afternoon I saw him talking to some devotees in the hall. While seated on his sofa, he slowly stretched his legs down until they touched the floor. He was holding his walking stick in his left hand, and massaging his knees with his right hand. As he did this, he slowly tried to stand up. Then, he remembered that he was not due to go out until 5:00 p.m, and looked up at the clock. Just at that moment it began to strike five o'clock! He just smiled at this and got up to walk towards the Arunachala hill for his evening ablutions in the running stream and, as was his custom, do a little exercise. We followed him for a short distance, and then left him to walk on with his attendant.

Sadhu Arunachala (Major A.W. Chadwick) would meditate in the hall leaning against a library cupboard with a belt strapped around his back and legs. He was training himself to sit properly in a cross-legged position while meditating, like the other seekers. Devoted Echammal amma could also be seen sitting quietly and praying in the hall. Having lost her husband and her two children in quick succession, she had gone to Sri Bhagavan seeking consolation. By his grace, she regained her calm and normality in due course. Many such spiritually-healed fortunates stayed in the ashram, when I was there, quietly communing with the Divine.

Around sunset, the evening prayer and meditation session started. It was accompanied by Vedic chanting, singing, prayers and meditation, as in the morning. The last item in the programme would be silent communion, when everyone would try to meditate in the presence of Bhagavan. He would

be seated on his cot completely absorbed, like Sri Mahadeva, Lord Siva.

Once, one of the Ashram administrative sevaks came near Bhagavan's sofa at this time and began calling out, "Bhagavan, Bhagavan, Bhagavan!" – louder and louder and louder. At first Bhagavan was unaware of his calls, as he was totally immersed in that inner Divine Quiet of peace and bliss. However, as the sevak's voice became ever louder, Bhagavan returned to everyday consciousness and responded in Tamil, "Enna, enna" (What, what)? We used to enjoy witnessing such incidents many times throughout the day. During his various moods and attitudes, even though he was dealing with all manner of people, there would never be any expression of fatigue on his face, and I never saw him yawning. He appeared to be unceasingly in the experience of *sat-chit-ananda*.

### **Sri Ramana Hands Me Over to Sri Ramakrishna**

It seems to me that the events in my life occurred as the above subtitle suggests: I was enjoying my stay in Ramanasramam and having Sri Bhagavan's darshan daily whenever I was free from my humble *seva* (service) in the kitchen. After lunch, when I guarded the kitchen with a stick from the monkeys who were always trying to enter it through one of the big openings in the mud wall, I usually had some free time to read holy books from the library. (A proper kitchen was later built as donations and offerings came in.) The book that made the biggest impression on me was the Life of Sri Ramakrishna (with a foreword by Mahatma Gandhi). This was my first opportunity to learn of the holy, inspiring and wonderful life of Sri Ramakrishna. The book also spoke of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and the other monastic disciples and lay followers of Ramakrishna. Thus, I first came to learn about the Ramakrishna Mission and its headquarters at *Belur Mutt*, Kolkata while I was staying at Ramanasramam.

One day while I was reading this book in the kitchen, I was shocked to look up and see my uncle standing before me. He had come from Madras in his car to take me away. When I told him of my desire to stay in the ashram, he got angry and ordered me to get ready to leave.

At that moment I had a brain wave and decided to run away from the ashram and live independently on the hill of Arunachala. Going inside, I took my spare clothes and made off at about 2:00 p.m. towards Mount Arunachala. I did not want to be caught by any search party that might come looking for me, so I kept off the main track by going through the forest, avoiding Skandasramam and the other places where Sri Bhagavan was known to have stayed. Sure enough – as I was to learn later – my uncle was taken to all these places to look for me. Since he did not find me, he informed the people in Ramanasramam that my mother was fasting, wailing and praying for me to come back to our house in Madras. He then returned home empty handed.

That evening I climbed down the hill and slept on the veranda of an old temple without having had anything to eat or drink. Next morning after bathing, I went to the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple where they gave lunch-prasadam to devotees. After lunch I talked to one of the priests who allowed me to stay in the temple for about three days rendering some seva. It consisted of grinding sandalwood paste for the pujas of the various deities. By this time the people at Sri Ramanasramam had come to know that I was staying at the Arunachaleswara Temple. They called me back to the ashram. When I returned, they told me about my mother's wailing and weeping and pressurised me to go back home to pay her a visit, and said that afterwards, I could return to Sri Ramanasramam again. Having accepted this proposal, I went back home to the family house in Madras where my mother was. However, as was to be expected, my relatives prevailed on me not to take religion to the extreme but to



continue my studies. Reluctantly, I agreed to be admitted to the Engineering Institute and enrolled in a five-year course.

Fortunately, our house in Madras was very close to the Ramakrishna *Mutt* and Mission Centre in Mylapore. I began to visit the temple daily and started talking to the swamijis and *brahmacharis*. One day I was reading the works of Swami Vivekananda when a particular passage leapt out at me. Swamiji had written words to the effect, “You have devoted innumerable lives to family and material concerns. Can you not at least offer this one life to God?” Immediately the answer welled up from within me. ‘Yes, I can do that!’” This idea inspired me so much that I then and there made a firm resolution to offer myself up to Sri Ramakrishna – instead of studying and earning for another 10, 20 or more years as my family wanted.

I informed Revered Swami Asheshanandaji, then the warden of the Ramakrishna Mission Students’ Home in Madras, of my decision. I used to meet him regularly and he inspired me very much. He gave me a letter of introduction to Revered Swami Tyagishanandaji of the Bangalore Ramakrishna Mission Ashram. Thus in 1940, I again found myself running away – this time to join the Ramakrishna Mission’s Bangalore Ashram.

### **My Last Visit to Sri Bhagavan Ramana**

I stayed at the Bangalore ashram for about six years studying Sanskrit, the scriptures and the Mission disciplines of prayer, meditation and *seva*. In 1946 it was time for me to go to our headquarters at *Belur Mutt*, in Kolkata to be initiated. I was to receive a holy mantra from the President Maharaj, Revered Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, a disciple of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. In a separate ceremony I was also to dedicate myself to the holy order of Brahmacharya.

On the way to the Mission headquarters, I thought it would be good to visit Sri Ramanasramam to have a second and, perhaps, last darshan of Sri Ramana before he gave up

his body. I reached Sri Ramanasramam on the 17th February, 1946 along with two other devotees from Bangalore, and stayed there for three days. On the first day I sat on the floor for lunch with the other visiting devotees. Sri Bhagavan sat at the head of the line. I think it was ‘Kirai Patti’ (the ‘Spinach Granny’) who came first to serve Sri Bhagavan with a few dishes she had prepared. As she was in her nineties, Sri Bhagavan, in a raised voice asked her in Tamil, “Enna Kondu-vandirke” (What have you brought)? She described her dishes. Then she slowly distributed the same simple food, little by little, to all of us devotees.

I observed Sri Ramana as he was eating. He took some pieces of chilli out of his curry and pushed them away to a corner of his banana leaf. A few grains of rice happened to get stuck to the chillies. He scrupulously returned these to the rest of the food on his leaf, so that even these few grains would not get wasted. When he had finished his lunch, his leaf plate was totally clean (except, of course, for the few chillies pieces).

After lunch Bhagavan left for the hall where he normally sat on his sofa and gave darshan. I immediately followed him. When he reached the sofa, I offered my pranams to him and asked him in English to let me know the easiest path. Although Sri Bhagavan knew English, he normally spoke only in Tamil. He just looked at me and gestured with his hand for me to sit down. I sat down on the floor in front of him. Bhagavan observed the other devotees as they arrived, sit down and filled up the hall. Disappointed that he had not answered my question, I closed my eyes and began doing mental *japa*. After a while I heard him say to some professor who was known to him, “This boy wants to know a shortcut!” Then Bhagavan continued, “A shortcut to where?”

One of my friends who had sat down next to me nudged my leg and indicated that Sri Bhagavan was talking to me. I opened my eyes and saw that he was smiling at me: he had only been waiting for the other devotees to arrive so that

they too could benefit from his answer to my question! Of course, I told him that I wanted a shortcut to *atma-darshan* – the revelation of the Self. He asked me what method I was presently practising. I replied that in my own humble way I was practising *japa-sadhana*. Hearing this, Sri Bhagavan responded that *japa* was not only simple and direct, but the best method to use to make progress in spiritual life. He quoted a phrase from the *Bhagavad Gita* 10.25: “yajnanam japayajno’smi” (Among sacrifices, I am the sacrifice of *japa*).

Further elaborating, he said that of all the ways to offer oneself to *paramatman* (the Supreme Being), the easiest and the best method was the repetition of the mantra of one’s own chosen deity. *Japa* promoted a constant flow of loving prayer from within for inner illumination. This woke up a subtle thirst that steadily increased, leading to a strong current of continuous divine discontent known as *vyakulata*. When this holy attitude developed into deep absorption (*dhyana*), the divinity revealed itself from within. This was *atma-darshan*.

Sri Bhagavan continued to explain about *japa-sadhana* and Self-realisation. However, an anxious brahmin devotee with a thick sacred thread who was seated a short distance away loudly interrupted to ask him a question about creation and its cause. The brahmin said that some scriptures mentioned that creation was due to the karma of Brahma, the creator, while other scriptures stated that creation occurred due to the karma of jivas (souls). He wanted Sri Bhagavan to resolve this difference of opinion. Sri Ramana just gave him a kind look, and then continued to explain the subject of *japa* by quoting another verse from the *Gita*,

yogayukto viśuddhātmā vijitātmā jitendriyaḥ |  
sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā kurvannapi na lipyate ||

(*Bhagavad Gita*, 5.7)

(“With the mind purified, with devotion to performance of action, and the body conquered and the senses subdued, one who realises the self as the self in all beings, though engaged in action, is not tainted.”)

Sri Bhagavan was evidently in a good mood and went on expounding spiritual thoughts based on this *Gita* verse for about twenty-five minutes. The devotees in the packed hall lapped up his sacred words of spiritual revelation. Bhagavan explained that the aspirant first repeats the mantra out loud with diligence and devotion. Then, as his or her loving attitude intensifies, the repetition gradually becomes internalised. As the body, senses and mind get purified and become free from their selfish nature, the whole being gets attuned to the Divine. The power of the mantra enters every aspect of the individual. The aspirant becomes *mantramaya* (filled with the spiritual power of the mantra), in and through all activities. One's life gets transformed into a continuous offering to the Lord, without any attachment to the results of one's actions.

The impatient brahmin repeated his question about creation, however. This time Sri Bhagavan graciously told him that if he would only try to understand the method he had just explained, the answers to all his questions would spontaneously arise within him. As one dives deep within, the mind dissolves into the Self, and all distinctions between bhakta (devotee), bhagavan (the Lord) and *Bhagavata* (the sacred text) vanish in divine illumination.

## 94. Sivanandalahari\*

**I**t would be logical to say that the paths of knowledge and devotion are incompatible, since Knowledge implies realisation of the non-dual Self while devotion requires two – one to worship and One to be worshipped. However, logic does not always work. Human nature is not simple, and the same mind which, holding itself in abeyance, feels non-dual Identity to be all may also melt in devotion before Him

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\* Selection by Sri Ramana Maharshi of verses by Adi Sankaracharya.

who is that All. A sign of this is that Sankara Acharya, the classical *Advaitin* and *Vedantist*, also composed devotional songs; another is that Ramana Maharshi, the great *Advaitin* of modern times, wrote in his ‘Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala’\* one of the greatest allegorical love-poems of all times and all religions.

He also selected ten verses from Sri Sankara’s ‘Hymn to Siva’ (of which Prof. T.M.P. Mahadevan’s translation and commentary is reviewed in the *Mountain Path* July 1964 issue) and arranged them in an order which seemed to him effective. These ten verses are given below, headed by their serial numbers in the original poem.

### 61

When the flow of the mind reaches the lotus-feet of the Lord of soul† and remains there always, just as the seeds of the *ankola* tree adhere to the tree, the needle to the magnet, the chaste wife to her husband and the river to the ocean, that is called devotion.

### 76

Devotion, like the cloud in the sky of the great Lord, emits a shower of bliss; he whose mind is a lake to be filled by this reaps the full harvest of life: he and he alone.

### 83

Not the slightest happiness accrues from worshipping gods who are born and die; of this there is no doubt. They who here adore the birth-less, eternal Lord of Parvati‡ are the fortunate ones: they it is who attain the supreme happiness.

### 6

Will pot or lump of clay, will atom, whether of smoke, fire or mountain, whether of cloth or thread,‡ will any of these

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\* Quoted in *The Mountain Path* issue of October 1964.

† A term for Siva.

‡ These are conventional terms used in Hindu logic and argument.

serve as a bulwark against dread death? You only strain your throat unnecessarily by logic-chopping. Hasten, you who are wise, to worship the lotus-feet of Sambhu\* and attain the supreme happiness.

## 65

Oh Consort of Parvati\*! what is impossible for him whose mind worships Thy feet? At sight of him Yama flees, fearing another kick in the chest†; the gods wave lamps consisting of the flaming gems set in their crowns, and,‡ the bride, clasps him in unyielding embrace.

## 10

Whether one is born a man or a god, a wild animal of the mountain or forest, a mosquito, a cow, or a worm, a bird or any other creature, what does it matter in what body, so long as the heart bathes endlessly in the supreme bliss of contemplation of Thy lotus-feet?

## 12

Tell me, what difference does it make whether one lives in a cave or house or in the open, in a forest or on top of a mountain, in water or in fire? He, Oh Sambhu,\* is happy whose mind dwells always at Thy feet; that indeed is yoga and he the supreme yogi.

## 9

Oh Lord of Uma!† What a fool he is who enters a deep water-tank or a fearful uninhabited forest or roams over a high mountain to gather flowers!§ He does not know how to

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The meaning is: Will academic philosophy help you in facing death?

\* A term for Siva.

† This refers to the myth of Markandeya, a devotee who overcame Yama, the God of death.

‡ Liberation.

§ Flowers to be offered up in worship. The water tank is included because it is there that lotus flowers would be gathered.

live here in happiness, offering up to Thee the single lotus of his heart.

## 11

What difference does it make, Oh Lord, whether one be a student, a householder, a renunciate or a homeless wanderer? \* Oh Sambhu, Lord of souls! When one's heart-lotus becomes Thine, Thou becomest his and dost bear the burden of his life.

## 91

O Crescent-crested Lord, through Thy Grace the beginningless ignorance in the Heart has been dispelled and the joy of Knowledge has taken its place. I meditate on and adore Thy lotus-feet, bearers of welfare and bestowers of Liberation.

# 95. On Dipavali

**By Ramana Maharshi**

**Y**early all over India the festival of the Lights or Dipavali is celebrated with presents and fireworks, in many ways it corresponds to the western Christmas. Bhagavan was asked to explain the significance of this festival. He replied as follows:

He who seeks whence is Naraka,  
Who this hell-like world is ruling,  
Mistaking the filthy body  
For the Self, and after kills him  
By the means of Wisdom's Wheel,  
Is Narayana. And that day  
When he does it is auspicious,  
Called *Naraka-Chaturdasi*.

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\* These are the four traditional stages of Hindu life, according to the classical model.

Know Dipavali is shining  
 As the real Self, having sought for  
 Naraka, the mighty sinner,  
 That one who deteriorated  
 Taking for the Self the mansion  
 Of this hell-like, guileful body,  
 Having sought him and then slain him.

NOTE: *Naraka-Chaturdasi* = Dipavali. *Chaturdasi* = fourteenth, as it is said that Naraka was slain by Krishna on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of *Aswija*.

The story told above is that Naraka, a mighty *Asura*, was ruling the lower worlds very badly and causing a great deal of trouble and that Krishna came and slew him. On account of that anyone who thinks of Krishna on that day will receive his Grace. Here Naraka is identified with the person who identifies himself with his body, and this identification is killed by the Grace of God.

## 96. Visit to Bhagavan\*

Swami Ramdas was born Vittal Rao in Hosdurg in Kerala in 1884. Even as a child, people remarked on the extraordinary lustre of his eyes. He also possessed an unequalled wit and sense of humour. His high school career was marked by extreme indifference to his studies. As a young man, he was employed as a spinning master in a cotton mill, married in 1908, and had a daughter. During his life before renunciation, brief periods of employment were followed by longer periods of unemployment and idleness, affecting both his financial condition and domestic life. To get relief from his outer circumstances, he began to chant ‘Ram,’ a name of God, which brought him great mental peace and joy. Soon

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\* Swami Ramdas, *The Mountain Path*, January 1965.



after, his father gave him a holy mantra, and from that point on, his progress and detachment from the material world was quick. He left his worldly life and began a pilgrimage, taking on the name Ramdas and living on the road in faith. He never accepted money and no matter how badly he was treated, he responded only with love. As a result, many were transformed by their encounters with him.

In 1922 he encountered the sage, Ramana Maharshi, and received his grace. He then spent twenty days in a cave on Arunachala Hill, constantly chanting his mantra. There he attained the vision of God, both in his heart and as the entire universe.

In 1931, after years of living on the road in faith, his devotees established Anandasramam for him in Kanhangad, Kerala, where he lived with Mother Krishnabai, who also attained the universal vision of God. They worked to improve the living conditions of the local people, founding a school for the children, establishing a free medical clinic, and setting up a cooperative of weavers. Together, they made extensive tours in India, and a world tour in 1954-55, with the purpose of sharing a message of Universal Love and Service.

Thousands of devotees, both from India and abroad took advantage of his most enlightening and inspiring presence till he dropped his mortal coil in 1963.

In his early autobiography, *In Quest of God*, (published by Anandasramam, Kanhangad) Swami Ramdas describes how he attained the Divine Vision through the Grace of Maharshi. Years later he told this story to Dilip Kumar Roy, who reproduced it in his latest book, *The Flute Calls Still* (published by Indira Niloy, Hare Krishna Mandir, Poona). Since some parts of the story are more detailed in one account and some in the other, we have combined them. Swami Ramdas always referred to himself as Ramdas.

“Papa,” I (D.K. Roy) asked, “would you mind telling us about your final Realisation which they call *Vishvarupa Darshan*?”

He, Swami Ramdas readily acquiesced and gave a long description of his burning aspiration and yearning which had led him to Arunachala Hill, hallowed by the tapas of the peerless saint Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. I give here only the gist of his long narration. . .

“One day, the kind Sadhuram took Ramdas for the darshan of a famous saint of the place named Ramana Maharshi. His Ashram was at the foot of Arunachala. It was just a thatched shed. The visitors entered the Ashram and, meeting the saint, fell prostrate at his holy feet. It was really a blessed place where that great man lived. He was young, but there was in his face a calmness and, in his large eyes, a passionless look of tenderness, which cast a spell of peace and joy for all those who came to him. Ramdas was overjoyed that the saint knew English, so he addressed him thus: ‘Maharaj, here stands before thee a humble slave. Have pity on him. His only prayer to thee is to give him thy blessing.’

“The Maharshi turned his beautiful eyes towards Ramdas and looked intently for a few minutes into his eyes, as though he was pouring into Ramdas his blessing through those orbs, then shook his head to indicate that he had blessed him. A thrill of inexpressible joy coursed through Ramdas, his whole body quivering like a leaf in the breeze...

“Now at the prompting of Sadhuram, Ramdas desired to remain in solitude for some time. . . Sadhuram was ever ready to fulfil his wishes. Losing no time, he took Ramdas up the Mountain Arunachala behind the great temple. Climbing high up, he showed him many caves. Of these, one small cave (just below the Virupaksha, called the *Sadguru* Swami cave or the Banyan Tree Cave) was selected for Ramdas, which he occupied next day. In this cave, he lived for nearly a month in deep meditation. This was the first time he was in solitude for his bhajan. Now he felt the most blissful sensations, since he could hold undisturbed communion with Lord Rama. He was rolling in a sea of indescribable happiness. To fix the mind on that fountain of bliss, Lord Rama, means, to experience pure

joy. . . He went on taking the Name in an ecstasy of longing when, lo, suddenly his Lord Rama . . . appeared before him and danced and danced . . .”

“Did you see him with closed eyes or open?” I interjected.

“With open eyes, as Ramdas is seeing you,” Papa answered. “But it was not this momentary vision that Ramdas’ heart craved. For he knew that a vision like this was unlikely to last and so, when the Lord vanished, Ramdas reverted to his darkness. Therefore, he prayed for the great darshan, the vision of visions, which comes to stay forever; so that there is no more parting, namely the *vishvarupa* darshan, seeing Rama always in everything; nothing less would satisfy Ramdas.”

Papa paused and then resumed with a beatific smile: “And it came one morning when, lo, the entire landscape changed: all was Rama, nothing but Rama wherever Ramdas looked! Rama – vivid, marvellous, rapturous – the trees, the shrubs, the ants, the cows, the cats, the dogs, everything, even inanimate things pulsed with the marvellous presence of the One Rama. And Ramdas danced in joy, like a little boy who, when given a lovely present, can’t help breaking out into a dance. So it was with Ramdas: he danced with joy and rushed at a tree, which he embraced because it was not a tree but Rama Himself! A man was passing by. Ramdas ran towards him and embraced him, calling out: ‘Rama, O Rama!’ The man got scared and bolted. But Ramdas gave him chase and dragged him back to his cave. The man noted that Ramdas had not a tooth in his mouth and so felt a little reassured: at least the looney would not be able to bite him!” Swami Ramdas laughed out and we swelled the chorus.

“And then?” I asked, after the laughter had subsided.

“The bliss and joy came to be permanent, like a torrent rushing downhill till it finds the placid level of a limpid, purling stream. This experience is called *sahaja samadhi*, in which you can never be cut off from the consciousness of being at one with the One who has become all, in which you

feel you are one with all because you have perceived that all is He, the One without a second.”

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Finally, we end with a comment made by Swami Ramdas in *The Vision*, the monthly journal published by Anandasramam many years later.

“Ramdas went to Ramana Maharshi in a state of complete obliviousness of the world. He felt thrills of ecstasy in his presence. Maharshi made the awakening permanent in Ramdas.”

Some people said to Ramdas, “You went to the Maharshi and you got illumination. Give us illumination like that.” Ramdas replied, “You must come to Ramdas in the same spirit and in the same state as he went to the Maharshi. Then you will also get it. Where was his heart? How intense was his longing? What was the world to him at that time? If you come in that state it is all right.”

## 97. The Maharshi and the Path of Knowledge\*

*Prof. T.M.P. Mahadevan, head of the philosophy department of Madras University, is known not only in India but in academic circles throughout the world as one of the leading exponents of Advaita. He has presented the truth of its doctrines in books and articles and at the many international philosophical conferences he has attended. Best known, perhaps, of his books are Gaudapada, A Study in Early Advaita (published by the University of Madras) and Philosophy of Advaita (published by Ganesh & Co., Madras). What is perhaps not so well known is that, behind the defensive armaments of philosophy, Prof.*

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\* T.M.P. Mahadevan, *The Mountain Path*, October 1964.

*Mahadevan is heart and soul a devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.*

*Prof. Mahadevan has the ability, so rare among professional philosophers, to express himself in case of need in direct language free from academic terminology. Knowing 'The Mountain Path' to circulate far beyond academic circles, he has written this article for us in language that all can follow, without sacrificing anything in profundity or exactitude.*

**J**nana or Knowledge, according to Advaita, is the sole direct means to Liberation. *Jnana* may mean Self-Knowledge or knowledge as a path to Self-realisation. The former, *svarupa-jnana*, is the Self as pure Consciousness, the latter is the process culminating in *akhandakara-vritti*, that is the mode of mind whose content is the impartite Self. *Advaitic* teaching is that knowledge is the path one should follow in order to gain Self-Knowledge, which is the same as Liberation or Moksha.

The reason why knowledge is considered the direct means to Liberation is to be found in the conception of Liberation itself. Liberation means release from the cycle of birth-and-death. It is the psycho-physical organism that is involved in this cycle. However, there is no real involvement because the psycho-physical organism and the world in which it is apparently involved are only projections of nescience (*avidya*) and not real entities. Again, due to nescience, the Self is wrongly identified with the psycho-physical organism and is thought to be born and to die. This is the metaphysical error that is at the root of all evil. The confusion between the Self and the not-self and the erroneous mingling of their characteristics constitutes nescience. Each earlier appearance in the world of the apparent self is the cause of the next subsequent appearance, so that in this sense nescience is said to be beginningless. Nevertheless, it is not eternal but can be destroyed. But only by true knowledge. When knowledge

dawns nescience is destroyed and it is realised that the Self was never bound but is ever free. This is Liberation.

Action cannot cause Liberation because action is not opposed to bondage and to its cause, nescience. When one says this one does not mean by ‘action’ simple movement of the body but movement with a sense of agency. ‘I act’ in this sense implies the identification of the Self with the ego as agent. It is this conceit of agency that constitutes the spring of action. The wrong identification and the consequent conceit are caused by nescience. Oblivion to the true nature of the Self as pure Consciousness is thus what gives rise to action; therefore, action cannot destroy nescience but only confirm bondage to it.

Action is said to produce any of four results: origination (*utpatti*), attainment (*prapti*), modification (*vikara*) and purification (*samskara*). Action of various kinds is required for, say, producing a pot out of clay (origination), arriving at a destination (attainment), making curds out of milk (modification), and cleaning a dusty mirror (purification). Liberation, which is the eternal nature of the Self, belongs to none of these four categories. The Self is eternal, so not to be originated; it is all-pervading, being non-dual, so not to be attained; it is uncompounded, being infinite, so not to be modified; it is blemishless, being of the sole consistency of Consciousness, so not to be purified. Therefore, action can do nothing to occasion Liberation.

In fact, Liberation is not to be occasioned at all. It is true that Liberation is said to be ‘attained’ when nescience is ‘destroyed’ by knowledge; but the terms ‘attainment’ and ‘destruction’ have to be understood here in a figurative sense. There are two kinds of attainment and two of destruction: attainment of the unattained and apparent attainment of the already attained; destruction of the undestroyed and apparent destruction of the non-existent. For the first kind action is needed, for the second knowledge. For instance, for getting an ornament made out of gold action is needed. But suppose

a person thinks he has lost his gold chain when in fact he is wearing it round his neck all the time only knowledge is needed. Someone points out to him that he is wearing it and it is as though he had found it. Similarly, for destroying a real snake action is needed, but for destroying a snake imagined in what is really a piece of rope all that is needed is enough light to see that there is no snake. The attainment of Liberation and destruction of bondage are of the second kind, since Liberation is eternal and therefore ever attained. It only seems to be unattained on account of nescience, and on, the dawn of knowledge its eternal nature is revealed. Similarly, bondage is unreal, being caused by nescience. At the dawn of knowledge, it seems to be removed, but it was never there. It follows, then, that knowledge and not action is the means of gaining Liberation and destroying bondage.

Action, however, is not without its use. Disinterested and dedicated action (*nishkama karma*, *karma yoga*) serves to purify the mind and thus prepare it for the path of knowledge. Although knowledge itself is not an act, it is the mind that has to seek and gain it. A mind that is impure and filled with passions and selfish desires cannot even turn in the direction of Self-knowledge. It is only the mind that has been rendered pure by the elimination of passions that will be inclined to pursue the path of knowledge. The discipline by which the passions may be eliminated is the performance of one's duties without caring for rewards. Craving for possessions and thirst for sense-enjoyments are what defile the mind and make it unfit for higher pursuits. Therefore, the mind must first, as a preliminary, be freed from defilements, and this can be done through action not motivated by finite ends.

Bhakti yoga (the path of devotion) and Raja-yoga (the path of mind control) can also find a place in the *Advaitic* scheme, as subordinates to the path of knowledge. Their purpose is to make the mind one-pointed and inward-turned. Attraction to false values, distraction and disintegration are the characteristics of the tainted mind. The tendency of the

mind to flow outward towards finite objects of enjoyment should be arrested, and it should be orientated towards God, the highest value. This is the purpose of bhakti-yoga.

It is the nature of the mind to be inconstant, darting from object to object, turbulent, obstinate and wayward. The function of raja-yoga is to discipline it and render it one-pointed. Constant and sustained practice of concentration (*abhyasa*) together with breath-control (*pranayama*) and other practices and cultivation of an attitude of detachment (*vairagya*) help to subdue and purify the mind and thus make it eligible to follow the path of knowledge.\*

Liberation is not necessarily a posthumous achievement, since it is the eternal nature of the Self. Even while in the body one can realise the Truth. This is known as *jivanmukti*. It is sometimes asked why the body should still continue in the case of one who has attained Liberation; but the question does not arise for the Liberated himself, since for him there is no body. It is the unrealised who see him with a body and ask the question. As a reply it is said that the body lasts as long as the *prarabdha* (that part of the karma which is to fructify in this lifetime), and that after that there is *videhamukti* (Liberation without a body). In truth, however, there is no distinction in Moksha.

Thus, *Advaitic* teaching is that knowledge, is the sole direct way to Liberation and that Liberation is the eternal nature of the Self.

The teaching of Sri Ramana Maharshi is in perfect accord with this. It is of unique value as an independent confirmation of the truth of Advaita, since he did not formulate a theory after formal study of Vedanta but discovered the path and its Goal afresh, gaining plenary experience through a single brief

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\* These preliminary exercises of karma yoga, *bhakti yoga* and *raja yoga* are helpful but not essential; the Maharshi was quite definite that the path of Self-enquiry as taught by him was all-sufficient and would accomplish also the tasks here assigned to preliminary yogas. (Editor)



act of Self-enquiry. And later, when the texts were read out to him, he recognized that they were speaking the same heart-language that he knew, the language of Advaita.\*

The Maharshi was no writer in the usual sense of the word. Sometimes he put in writing his occasional oral instructions and expositions. Some of these stray writings are in prose, some in verse, mostly in Tamil but some in Sanskrit and a few in Malayalam and Telugu. They constitute what may rightly be called the ‘Ramanopanishad’, since we have in them authentic instruction in the doctrine and path of Advaita.

Their central teaching is that the path of Self-enquiry is the direct way to Self-realisation. The sense of ‘I’ is natural and common to all, but few care to enquire into the actual nature of this ‘I’. We take it for granted and employ such empirical phrases as ‘I came’, ‘I went’, ‘I did’ or ‘I was’. What is this ‘I’? What am I? It is not difficult to see that the body is not ‘I’. It did not exist before birth and will not survive death. In deep sleep there is no body-consciousness. Even while waking I am aware that I have the body and therefore I cannot be the body. What is more difficult is to see that the mind or ego is not ‘I’. It springs from ignorance, being a superimposition on the Self. The I-thought is the first thought to arise, and the mind is the same as the ego. Ordinarily it goes out through the sense-channels and apprehends and enjoys external objects, but it must be made to turn inwards and enquire into the nature and source of itself. This can only be done with a still mind. This enquiry “is the only method of putting an end to all misery and ushering in supreme Beatitude. Whatever may be said and however phrased, this is the whole truth in a nutshell.”

Explaining the technique of Self-enquiry, the Maharshi says: “By steady and continuous investigation into the nature

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\* For an account of this see ‘*Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, Ch. 2, by Arthur Osborne, Rider & Co., London.

of the mind, the mind is transformed into that to which the ‘I’ refers; and that is in fact the Self.” He also instructed people to probe and find out where the I-thought arises. When the enquiry is persisted in it transpires that the ego dissolves in the Self which is the Heart (*hridayam*). It is true that the mind often gets distracted on the way and strays outwards, but every time this happens it must be brought back to the enquiry into its nature. This process has to continue till it subsides into its Source, the Self. For this there is no other means so effective as Self-enquiry. Other means such as breath-control and meditation for mind-control may lead to a temporary subsidence of the mind but not to final Liberation. It will rise up again.

On the path of Self-enquiry, it is admittedly the mind that investigates, but this self-investigation annihilates it and finally it gets destroyed, just as the stick used to stir a funeral pyre is itself finally burnt. This is the state of Liberation in which it is realised that there is no mind at all. What appeared to be the mind is really the Self, the Self manifest as ‘I-I’. This is *aham-sphurana*, *prajnana*, self-manifestation, wisdom.

The Maharshi’s most compact and compendious, and indeed scriptural, exposition of the path of knowledge and the truth of Advaita is his *Forty Verses on Reality*, *Ulladu Narpadu*. It explains that the mind consists of thoughts, of which the first to arise is ‘I’. The discipline prescribed is to enquire with a keen mind whence this ‘I’ arises (verse 23). To say that the ‘I’ arises means that the Self and the not-self are fastened in a knot which is called technically ‘superimposition’ or ‘nescience’.

Bondage, soul, subtle body, egoity, transmigration, mind, all mean the same (24). They are the I-thought or ego functioning in various ways. So long as it dwells in the body it acts, experiences and enjoys; on leaving the body it finds another. But when its nature is investigated it takes to flight and turns out to be devoid of substance (25). The ego is the prop of all appearances. If the ego is all else is; if the ego

is not nothing else is. The ego is all. So when the ego is investigated and its unreality perceived all phenomena are given up (26). When, through enquiry, the state where the ego does not rise up is reached, there is the non-dual Self. When the ego is lost the Self is gained (27). One should dive into oneself, with senses and mind controlled, and find the place whence the 'I-I' rises in order to recover the Self, as one would dive into water to get back some precious jewel that had fallen into it (28). Verbal repetition of the word 'I-I' is not the enquiry, nor is meditation 'I am not this, I am that'; this may help but the actual enquiry is the direct path. It is to be done with the mind turned inwards (29). Through the enquiry the mind reaches the Heart, which is only another name for the Self, and there the pseudo-I sinks crestfallen and the real 'I-I', the Self, shines of its own accord. This real 'I' is not an object to be seen or realised; it is the plenary Reality (30). The destruction of the ego through Self-enquiry and the gaining of Self-awareness is the only achievement; there is nothing else to be accomplished. Pure Self-awareness is perfection (31). This is the realisation that one always is and was the Self and that there is no other Reality (32).

It is useless to indulge in metaphysical speculation about Reality. "Does anything exist or not? Has Reality form or is it formless? Is it one, two or neither? These are questions engendered by ignorance" (34). Similarly, philosophical questions about time and space, the world and God, free will and predestination, are powerless to lead us out of our state of ignorance. When such questions occur the enquirer should turn to the basic question: to whom do they occur? One must question the questioner. When the questioner is known there will be no questions left to ask or answer.

To seek the eternally achieved Self and abide in it is the true achievement. Delusion and the misery born of it disappear once one is established in the natural state of the Self. The Self is not something to be newly realised; in fact, the very expression 'Realisation' is inapt, for the real does not need to

be ‘realised’. The term ‘Realisation’ has to be understood in a figurative sense only. The truth is that there is no plurality at all: from the standpoint of the

Absolute there is neither bondage nor release; there is no one bound and no one to be released. All that is is the non-dual Self.

This is the theme of *Ulladu Narpadu*, a tremendous poem proclaiming the Ultimate Reality and the path to its Realisation.

In the later years at Sri Ramanasramam there used to be a daily stream of visitors and spiritual aspirants seeking to have their doubts clarified and difficulties removed by putting questions to Sri Ramana Maharshi. Some of the talks that ensued were recorded by competent resident devotees. The largest such compendium which has been preserved and published is “Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi”. Questions about the path and the goal come up constantly and the Master’s answers are always from the standpoint of Advaita-experience.

Again and again he stresses (like Gaudapada and Sankara and other ancient Masters) that Perfection, Moksha, is not anything new to be acquired. “Realisation is our nature. It is not anything new to be gained. What is new cannot be eternal” (Talk 401). “You do not acquire happiness; your very nature is happiness. Bliss is not newly earned. All that is to be done is to remove unhappiness” (Talk 290).

*Ajnana* (ignorance) is the cause of bondage; and *ajnana* is unreal. The world of duality is an illusory projection of *ajnana*. When the unreality of *ajnana* is realised the eternal *Jnana*, Knowledge, shines of itself. “To know that there never was ignorance is the goal of all spiritual teachings. Ignorance must be of one who is aware – Awareness is *jnana* and *jnana* is eternal and natural. So *ajnana* is unnatural and unreal” (Talk 289).

A mental support to Self-enquiry, though it cannot be the enquiry itself, is to analyse the three states of

experience: waking, dream and deep sleep. This is also referred to in the *Mandukya Upanishad* and by Gaudapada in his *Karika*. The Maharshi explains that there is no real difference between the waking and dream states and that both are unreal from the standpoint of the Absolute. The state of deep sleep shows that ‘I’ and the world are not real (in the sense of permanent) since they appear only in the waking and dream states. “How does sleep differ from the other two states? In sleep there are no thoughts, whereas in the other two states there are. Therefore, thoughts must be the origin of ‘I’ and the world. What are they? They cannot be natural (in the sense of permanent) or they could not appear at one moment and disappear at another. Where do they come from? They must be admitted to have an ever-present and invariable source. It must be the eternal state . . . that from which all beings come forth, that in which they remain and that into which they resolve” (Talk 641).

The accepted rule is: “that which is constant in variable things is real, that which is inconstant is unreal, ‘I’ and the world are inconstant; the Self alone is constant”. In the waking and dream states our bodies attach themselves to us and we are afflicted by the I-am-the-body idea. “Because the body exists you say that it was born and will die, and then you transfer the idea to the Self, saying that you are born and will die. In fact, you remain without the body in sleep, but now you remain with it. The Self can remain without the body but the body cannot exist apart from the Self. The ‘I-am-the-body’ thought is ignorance; that the body does not exist apart from the Self is knowledge ... So long as there is the sense of separation there will be afflicting thoughts. If the original source is regained and the sense of separation put an end to, there is peace” (Talk 396).

## 98. What Sri Ramana Means to Me\*

A continuous awareness of the inner Reality, a mind of a supreme balance and an equal vision resulting from a perception of the one *satchidananda atma* in all forms of life. A silent expression of a cosmic outlook on life, were characteristic of Ramana who, by the splendid example of his daily *adhyatmic* life, illustrated so vividly some of the most significant utterances of the Upanishads regarding the nature of liberated persons.

Of Ramana, it can be truly said: “He does not desire, he has no desire, he is freed from desire, his desire is satisfied, his desire is the Self.” “He is the greatest among the knowers of Brahman.” “He sees the Self in the Self and sees everything as the Self. Evil does not overcome him; on the other hand, he overcomes all evil. Evil does not burn him; on the other hand, he burns all evil.” “He is the (real) Brahmin who leaves this world, having known the Imperishable.” Such statements of the Upanishads portray more meaningfully and even more faithfully than the words of his biographers, what he was and what he means.

Absolute liberation is a transcendental experience lying beyond all conception and expression; and the internal spiritual processes in the day to day consciousness of Ramana consisted of the single unchanging realisation of the Absolute Self. Established in the condition of *Brahma jnana* and indifferent to the play of life and to the rhythms of law, he was one who saw, as the *Isha Upanishad* would put it, “All beings in his own Self, and the Self in all beings.” As to his attitude to his body, there is this illuminating statement in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV, 4.7: “As the slough of a snake lies inanimate and cast off on an ant hill, even so lies this body (of the living liberated man). But this incorporeal, immortal Life Principle is Brahman alone, the Light alone.”

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\* Swami Sivananda, *The Call Divine*, January 1958.

Those who have had the blessing of the darshan of Ramana will never forget those brilliant, steady and serene eyes, the deep sense of peace one experienced in his presence, the compelling elevation one felt in his proximity. The real state of a Self-knowing *jnani* is no matter for easy description. The life of Ramana illustrated this passage from the *Varaha Upanishad*. He rested “with an unshaken mind in that all-pure abode which is *chinmatra*... free from all the modifications of *chitta*...” Though participating in all the illusory objects, he was “cool amidst them” and was “a full *atma*, as if they belonged to others.” He was one, who stayed, as the *Tejobindu Upanishad* states, “in *chinmatra* or Absolute Consciousness alone, whose interior (was) Consciousness alone, which (was) only of the nature of *chinmatra*.” In order to know what Ramana meant to himself, and to others, there are answers in the Upanishads. *Maitreya Upanishad* says “I am ‘I’, the Eternal, the Stainless, *vijnana*, *chaitanya*, the Light, the One.” And the *Kaivalya Upanishad* says, “I am always of the form of *chit*; I am the One that should be known by Self-Knowledge, by the Vedas.”

As a matter of my immediate spiritual experience, Ramana is the living, talking, seeing, guiding transcendental Reality, bent on transfiguring with its Light the higher levels of our purified consciousness. Ramana is here and now with us. He is more easily accessible to us now than he was when environed in the limitations of a bodily mansion. He is more palpable to our inner faith and thought and spirit now than when the glimpses of his Godhead were given us through the half closed eyes of the clay tenement he in dwelt at Arunachala. Offer Ramana the conditions of the devotion of your heart, the earnest longing of your soul, the Mountain moving faith in him, a certain receptivity to the Light and Grace of his all-pervading Presence. He is standing by you as a Reality more real than your physical experiences than your mental preoccupations, awaiting to be touched, felt and known by you. The Powers and the Presence of the liberated

Consciousness of Ramana are here with us, to be sensed and experienced and utilised by our aspiring natures, by our purified hearts and minds. I know of a few sadhakas who have been directly contacting Ramana not only in the hours of intense meditation but in their normal life whenever they direct a single thought towards him. We would be in perpetual attunement with Ramana if only we can transcend the heavy limitations of an egoistic mode of consciousness.

The Central message of Ramana was that we should subject ourselves to psychological self-observation, liberate ourselves from the ego idea; grow conscious of the pure spiritual “I”-awareness and live in it as he lived in it all through the life of his physical embodiment and is living in it now. By the magical working offices of prayer, by the power of the sincerity of our longing for his Experience, let us elevate our consciousness from the base impurities of the mind. Free ourselves from the insistent vehemence of the vital nature, from every form of egoistic existence; this done, I assure you, we would experience Ramana’s living Presence here and now. It is the imperfection of our surrender unto the Maharshi, of our faith in him, of our effort to realise him here and now, that is obscuring our vision, the perception, and experience of His Divine Grace, Presence and Light. Therefore, it is that we need to make more intense, the inner spiritual sadhana, so that Ramana may be a matter of our immediate experience. It is then that the Light and Love of all pervading Ramana possesses our entire being and gives us a knowledge as to how dynamically active he is in the higher consciousness of spiritual humanity. I offer my heartfelt prayers to Ramana.



## 99. Tales of Bhagavan\*

People, who expected the Supreme to be uniformly monotonous, acting in an invariable and stereotyped way, could not find their bearings when they had to deal with Bhagavan. He never reacted twice in the same way. The unexpected with him was inevitable. He would deny every expectation, go against every probability. He seemed to be completely indifferent to whatever was going on in the Ashram and would give an immense amount of care to some apparently insignificant detail. He would be highly critical of the Ashram manager's passion for improvement and expansion and yet take personal interest in the work of the carpenters and masons. He would scold his younger brother soundly but would rebuke anybody who came to him with some complaint against him. He did not even want to hear about the money coming to the Ashram, but would read carefully the incoming and outgoing letters. He would refuse his consent to a certain work, but if it were done against his wishes, he would earnestly cooperate. When asked to agree to the building of the temple, he said, "Do as you please, but do not use my name for collecting money." Yet he would closely watch the progress of the work and wander in the night among the scaffolding, with his torch in one hand and his stick in the other. When the *Sri Chakra* was placed in the sanctum of the temple, he went there at midnight and laid his hands on it. He would deny all responsibility for starting and developing the Ashram, would refuse to claim it as his property, but signed a will creating a hereditary managership for the Ashram. He would refuse all treatment when asked, but would swallow any medicine that was given to him without asking. If each well-wisher offered his own remedy, he would take them all at the same time. He would relish some rustic dish and would turn away from costly delicacies.

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\* Chalam, *Ramana Smriti*.

He would invite people for food, but when asked for a meal he would plead his helplessness in the matter. Sometimes he would take a man to the kitchen and cook and serve him with his own hands. He insisted that beggars should be fed first, but would say that the Ashram was for visitors, not for beggars. He would be tender with a sick squirrel and would not outwardly show any feeling when an old and faithful devotee was dying. A serious loss or damage would leave him unconcerned, while he may shout warnings lest a glass pane in a cupboard should break. Greatness, wealth, beauty, power, penance, fame, philanthropy – all these would make no impression on him, but a lame monkey would absorb him for days on end. He would ignore a man for a long time and then suddenly turn to him with a broad smile and start an animated discussion. To a question about life after death he would retort, ‘Who is asking?’ but to another man he would explain in great detail what death was and what the state of mind was after death. It was clear that all he did was rooted in some hidden centre to which none of us had any access. He was entirely self-directed, or rather, Self-directed.

Once, somebody brought Bhagavan a wounded dove. Bhagavan held it in his hands for some time and then asked the devotees gathered in the hall, “Who will take good care of this bird until it is quite well?” No offer came. Some time back the Maharani of Baroda had presented a white peacock to the Ashram and everybody was eager to take charge of it. Bhagavan looked around and started talking to the dove, “What a pity you are not a peacock. You are a mere dove, a useless little thing, not a costly bird presented by a Maharani. Who wants you? Who will care for you?” The dove was kept in the Ashram in a clumsy cage, became well and flew away. But the lesson of universal compassion remained.

An old Telugu man with a long beard, an iron pot and chopper for cutting wood made his abode in the Draupadi temple. He would beg some food in the town, boil something or other in his iron pot on a small fire of wood cut with his

chopper and eat it during the day. For hours together he could be seen standing and looking at Bhagavan. He would spend the night in the temple, which was dilapidated and abandoned and surrounded by jungle. Once, the writer of this piece found him standing all alone in front of the temple and gazing at Arunachala. "I sleep here", he said when the writer asked him what he was doing in the forsaken temple. "What, sleeping here all alone? Are you not afraid?", exclaimed Chalam. The old man seemed indignant. "Afraid of what? Bhagavan throws his light upon me. All through the night I am surrounded by a blue radiance. As long as his light is with me, how can I be afraid?" The incident made Chalam deeply humble. Bhagavan's love and light was given in full measure to a poor old beggar, while those who pride themselves on being his chosen disciples are left high and dry because they have themselves to attend to.

Echammal was one of Bhagavan's earliest devotees. She regularly brought food to him when he was living on the Hill. Her property went to help his devotees. She practised *yoga* assiduously and died when in a yogic trance. When Bhagavan heard the news, he said, "Oh, is it so?" After Echammal's body was burnt, Shantamma came into the hall and told Bhagavan that the cremation was over. He said, "Yes, it is all right." And he added after a while, "I warned her not to practice *yoga*. She would not listen. Therefore, she had to die unconscious and not in full awareness."

A man was telling Bhagavan that he learnt one type of *yoga* under one master, some other type under a different master and so on. The dinner bell started ringing. "Now learn the *yoga* of eating under this master", said Bhagavan, and took the man to have his dinner.

A lady devotee prayed to Bhagavan, "My only desire is that you may always be with us". Bhagavan exclaimed, "Look at her, she wants us all to turn into stones, so that we may sit here forever."

A friend from Bombay came to have a look at the Ashram and to find out what it was all about. He had little faith himself but wanted to know what exactly drew people to Bhagavan. He would get hold of this man and that and keep on asking all sorts of questions. A Norwegian sadhu lived at that time near the Ashram and we went one evening in search of him. He lived in a small cubby hole, meant for a bathroom. He slept and cooked his food there. It was wonderful to think that an educated European had accepted this kind of life just to be near Bhagavan. With his beard, long hair and weather-beaten face he looked old, but in reality he was quite young. During his university years he had studied comparative religion and thus was attracted to India and to Indian philosophy. Even in Norway, whenever he would meet an Indian he would question him eagerly, only to discover that Indians on the whole knew very little of their glorious heritage. This had only strengthened his desire to go to India, meet the people who knew, and learn from them. He tried hard and got a job as a lecturer in religion in one of the North Indian colleges. He joined and in his spare time was searching for a Guru. He was told that he could find one only in the Himalayas. He roamed the mountains and at last he found somebody who agreed to guide and instruct him. The Norwegian was very reticent about his Guru and would tell neither name nor place. But he gave up his job, joined his Guru in the mountains, learnt *sankhya yoga* under him and was told to do sadhana for four years and then come back. How was he to live for these four years? Again he got a job, this time in Bangalore. A fellow traveller in the train advised him strongly to go and meet Bhagavan before he took up his duties. He broke his journey, saw Bhagavan and could not leave. In Bhagavan's presence his *sankhya sadhana* became very vigorous and speedy. He had no money and just stretched every copper. He did not feel the need to return to the Himalayas. He said he would go on till the goal was reached. We returned wondering at Bhagavan's mighty power which attracted all,

however small or great. Our Bombay friend felt that there might be something in the Ashram beyond his ken and grew very humble.

### 100. The Gift of Life\*

**I**t was the first few weeks of my pregnancy when I was diagnosed with an internal hemorrhage. The prognosis was grave, and surgery was an option only as a last resort at the risk of losing the fetus. I was ordered complete bed rest with absolutely no movement, so to give the wound a chance to heal itself. I lay in bed all day and night staring at the ceiling most of the time. The only welcome distraction to my eyes was the picture of Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala that I had asked to be glued on the closet door at the foot of my bed. I tried to concentrate on my prayers, repeating “*Sri Arunachala Aksharamamalai*” as much as possible. But the physical pain was immense, not to mention the agony of being bedridden.

Though I was under excellent medical care and had full attention from my family, I felt my strength draining from my body with each passing day. One afternoon, I had an experience. I felt the heat dissipating from my body and a chillness setting in. My hearing began losing its sharpness, vision blurring, and a cloud of darkness set in. I could not move my hands, nor could I voice a single word, even though I was trying to scream from within. I felt suffocated, was aware of my consciousness slipping away and felt myself sinking into something that I have no words to describe. I panicked inside, gripped by the fear of death and thoughts of unfinished responsibilities. I experienced my life slipping

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\* A New York Devotee, ‘*The Maharshi*’ newsletter, September-October 2000.

away. At that moment, I cried inside to Bhagavan, begging Him, that if this was death, he should take me to Him.

Then, I had the vision of the holy Sri Arunachala Mountain zooming back and forth and Bhagavan standing at one side of the hill. There was an arc of light leaving my body, like what you see in children's fairy tale movies. Bhagavan raised his hand and pushed the light back into my body.

He then said, "This is not the time for you to go. You have a purpose in life. Do your duty." Then in the most gracious and affectionate way, he put his hand where I had been hurting and said, "Is this where you are hurt?"

After this I became conscious. I had no idea how long I was unconscious. All I knew was that this experience had transformed me, for when I became aware of the world, I had absolutely no pain. I immediately rose from my bed and walked briskly across the room. I felt and appeared perfectly healthy. The next visit to the doctor showed a completely healed wound.

Now I have been blessed with a beautiful, healthy baby. Bhagavan gave me a chance to bring a gift of life into my family. Every day I remind myself that I live by His grace alone.

## 101. The Maharshi and the Path of Devotion\*

Not only in India but in all religions the path of devotion or surrender has been prized as a method for attaining to God or winning Liberation. The four main paths recommended in Hinduism are karma, bhakti, yoga and *jnana* representing action, devotion, yogic development and knowledge; and it is held that man's business in life is to try to reach God by one or more of them. The above four include many varied techniques which different people practise in the hope of

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\* A. Devaraja Mudaliar, *The Mountain Path*, October 1964.

evolving spiritually and attaining perfection. Bhagavan Ramana has often said that all of them are good and all are difficult only according to the temperament and ability of an aspirant one or another may appeal to him most and look easiest. He also said that whatever method one may practise one must eventually attain to *Jnana*, that is to Divine Knowledge of the Self, the Absolute.

It is well known that Bhagavan taught that the shortest and most direct way to attain Self-realisation is to enquire who this 'I' or ego to which we refer at every turn, as 'I think', 'I want', 'I do', etc., really is and whence it arises. This 'I' is another name for the mind, which again is nothing but a bundle of thoughts. He taught that if, without allowing the mind to go outwards and indulge in thoughts of the world, we continuously and resolutely turn it back on itself to find the source whence it springs it will take us to the Self. This method is known as *vichara* or enquiry and comes under the heading of *jnana marga*.

It is not so well known, however, that Bhagavan was himself as much a bhakta as a *jnani*, a man of devotion as of knowledge. I could write at length on this subject, but it is hardly necessary. A perusal of his '*Five Hymns to Arunachala*' is enough to prove what a sincere and ardent devotee he was. What I wish to bring out here is that, when commending Self-enquiry and telling his questioner to ask himself 'Who am I?', Bhagavan often ended by saying: "If you say you have not the strength to do this, throw yourself on the one great Power which looks after all." I have heard him say this not once but a number of times. Even in his earliest book, that great little work 'Who am I?', he says: "God is prepared to take up all burdens, however heavy. Why not throw all your burdens also on Him and be free? Don't be foolish like the passenger in a railway train who carries his bag on his lap or shoulders instead of putting it on the rack." I have never heard him commend in this way, of his own accord, either *karma marga* or *yoga*.

In this connection, I would like to quote a stanza from a Tamil poem by the late Sivaprakasam Pillai, one of Bhagavan's oldest devotees and one whose authority to speak on Bhagavan's teachings it would be hard to dispute. "To all you give only the instruction: 'Ponder and find out who you are'. If, after that, any one still submissively asks for more you say as your final advice: 'There is a power (sakti) which moves you and me and all; surrender your ego at the feet of that Mother.'"

Not only many ancient saints of our land, but even recent ones, such as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Ramdas, to mention only two, have recommended the bhakti path of surrender. The Puranas have even gone further and laid down that for this spiritually dark age, the *kali yuga*, the path of bhakti is the best suited and the easiest to practise. Leave everything to God, throw yourself at His feet and just keep calling on His Name always. You need not do anything else. You will be saved. That is what they say.

But whatever any one may say, however easy at first sight the method may seem, once you begin to practise it earnestly you will find surrender, real and complete surrender, surrender without any mental reservations whatsoever, surrender to accept with joy, as coming from God, everything that befalls you, good, bad and indifferent, is a very hard thing indeed. But we are told that surrender will not work unless it is complete. There are two stories, one from the great epic, the Mahabharata, and the other told by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, that illustrate this. The first is that when Draupadi was left helpless, her mighty husbands having by then lost their freedom, and the evil Duryodhana and his friends tried to disrobe her in court, she prayed to Sri Krishna as her last and only refuge; but help did not come from him until she had given up the natural and almost involuntary effort to hold on to her sari and prevent it from being removed from her waist. So long as she struggled to help herself, Divine Grace could not flow to help her. The



story told by Ramakrishna is even more forceful. Someone picked a quarrel with a laundryman when he was washing clothes and began to beat him. The laundryman cried out to Vishnu for help. Vishnu was at that time disporting himself in paradise with his consort Lakshmi. On hearing the piteous cry of the laundryman he rose and started running towards the earth. A moment later, however, Lakshmi saw him strolling back in a leisurely way. “What is the matter?” she asked. “Why did you rush off so suddenly? And why do you now come back in no hurry?”

The Lord thereupon explained: “A devotee was beaten and prayed to me for help and protection, so I had to run to his rescue. But before I got there he took up a stick to defend himself, so why should I bother?”

This is what Bhagavan taught, that surrender must be complete or it will not be effective. It is clearly taught in our religious literature that before you can expect any progress in your spiritual state you must sacrifice or offer all you have, body, possessions and soul, to the Guru. We must also remember that God, Guru and Self are equated. Such surrender has been taught as a sure and sufficient means for the attainment of our spiritual goal, call it Mukti, Moksha, Nirvana, Liberation or what you will. Submission to the will of Allah is the basic command of Islam. Jesus said: “Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Krishna said: “Abandon all your duties and take refuge in Me alone. I will free you from all sins. Do not grieve.”

Sri Krishna definitely affirmed that if a man takes refuge at His feet and surrenders completely he need not do anything else, he need not bother about any other duties. This path of utter devotion and self-surrender has been proclaimed and followed by many a bhakta throughout India, especially by the great Saivite and Vaishnavite poet-saints of the Tamil land, by Tukaram, Eknath, Namdev and others in Maharashtra, and Chaitanya in Bengal. The Vaishnavites in particular

have attached great importance to the path of surrender as taught in the ‘Charama sloka’, as it is called, of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which I have already quoted. They call this surrender ‘Prapathi’ and have developed its doctrine in great detail, showing how far-reaching its ramifications can be.

I shall refer only to one or two aspects of this ‘Prapathi’ path which especially appeal to me. They say, for instance, that while in other paths God is the Goal and various other things are used as means, on the path of surrender both the means and the end are God. Another thing they say is that whereas on any other path more than one means may be employed and may even be necessary, on the path of surrender no other means are necessary or even admissible, for that would imply that your faith in surrender was not complete, and therefore your surrender itself was not. One illustration they quote for this argument is that in the Ramayana Indrajit used a powerful weapon called ‘Brahma Asthra’ with whose divine power he bound Hanuman hand and foot. The Rakshasas, however, seeking to make doubly sure, began to bind him also with ropes and chains, whereupon the divine weapon ceased to act owing to their lack of faith in it. To throw oneself completely on God, secure in His love and mercy and power, and not to dream of being able to do anything except by His Grace and Will is the Prapathi method taught by the Vaishnavites, and it has great value for the really ardent devotee.

Even recent saints have, in their great mercy, told some lucky disciples that if they surrendered completely to the Guru they need not do anything else. Once when Girish Chandra Ghosh wept before Ramakrishna and declared that he could not follow any discipline, however simple or short, Ramakrishna was pleased to tell him: “Then give me power of attorney”, meaning: ‘Surrender and I will do the rest!’

I once told Bhagavan: “I am another Girish. You must save me yourself. Every saint must have a Girish.”

Bhagavan replied: “But he gave power of attorney.”

“I too have surrendered to the extent that I am capable of,” I said: “What more can I do?”

Bhagavan said nothing.

It was not Bhagavan’s way to say, “Surrender and I will look after you.” However, the following incident is significant in that regard. About a year before Bhagavan left the body I said to him one afternoon: “I am going to sing Bhagavan three stanzas from a poem by Sivaprakasam Pillai because they express what I want to say better than I could.” I then sang them. Their meaning is: “I have not followed your teaching or instructions; but is it proper for a Guru to get disgusted with his devotee as an incorrigible beast and to give him up? If you let me go my own way like this, what is to happen to me? I shall not reform and you will not correct or change me. Have I any other help in this or the other world except you, my Lord? What, then, is your idea? Is this right behaviour for you?”

Bhagavan did not immediately reply, which caused me some disappointment. After a minute or two he said: “Whether I do anything or not, your business is only to surrender and keep still.”

Some friends have told me that I may take this to mean: “Don’t worry; I know what to do and will do it.” On the other hand, it may only mean: “If you really surrender you have no right to complain; so if a devotee complains it is a sign that he has not surrendered.” In any case, I prefer to be an optimist and believe that, however incomplete my surrender may be, so long as his Grace is complete he will look after me all right.

I recently read in ‘Bhavan’s Journal’ some of the teachings of Swami Nityananda who lived in Vajreswari for about thirty years and died a few years ago. A disciple asked him: “What should I do?”; and he replied: “You need not do anything.” I take that to mean anything except surrender and leave everything to the Guru.

Intellectuals may feel tempted to look down on the path of bhakti, but I think I have written enough to show that such an attitude is not justified. I will finish with one more story to illustrate this. Totapuri was an *Advaitin* whom Ramakrishna took as his guru, having already had a tantric guru. He had no patience with people worshipping a Personal God and used to make fun of Ramakrishna for constantly speaking of Kali and worshipping her and calling her ‘Mother’. He had never previously known ill health, when he was suddenly attacked by a severe and painful form of dysentery. It was so bad that after some days he decided to drown himself in the Ganges. He entered the river and walked towards the opposite bank, perhaps half a mile or so, only to find that the water never got more than knee-deep. Finally, Kali, Ramakrishna’s ‘Mother,’ appeared before him and thus miraculously converted him.

Let no humble devotee, therefore, feel discouraged if some philosopher or even saint condemns the path of surrender. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. It has worked and produced results all over the world, not only with bhaktas in India, but with Sufis in Persia and mystics both in the East and West. Above all, Sri Krishna has held out the promise that He will save all who come to Him and take refuge at His feet. Let us not doubt but let us surrender and achieve eternal Peace and Bliss.

## 102. Sri Ramana’s Wondrous Grace\*

Ever since I came to know of Maharshi the thought of Arunachala had always been in my mind but it did not give rise to any strong emotion up till now. Only, the mind was in a gloomy mood. When we were a few stations from Tiruvannamalai the thought of a rebuff at the Ashram became very strong and roused a correspondingly strong emotion in me.

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\* Anonymous, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*.

As I was unobserved, my one companion being fast asleep and there being nobody else in the compartment, I gave free vent to my emotion. After some time, it spent itself and the mind became resigned. The train now stopped at Tiruvannamalai. I roused my companion, who was still sleeping, and we set our feet on the sacred soil of Tiruvannamalai.

It was already dawn and we came out of the station. The Hill of Arunachala now caught our eyes. Silent and majestic it stood there, as if immersed in deep meditation. We saluted the *Jyotirlingam* and drove direct to the Ashram.

It happened to be the annual Birthday of Maharshi. Bhaktas were preparing to celebrate the day on a large scale. Huge preparations were being made for feeding a few thousand people and a big pandal was erected for the purpose.

At the farther end of the first quadrangle a small enclosure was erected and a seat was arranged there for Maharshi. Leaving a small space in front of the enclosure for the passage of pilgrims, the whole of the quadrangle and the adjoining verandah were crowded with visitors.

Maharshi took his seat within the enclosure. Pilgrims came in a line, prostrated themselves before him, paid their respects and then passed out of the quadrangle. A continuous stream of people passed in this way for a couple of hours. I was all along anxious to catch his eyes but could not do so. When the crowd became thinner, I got up, walked up to the enclosure and took my stand just outside it, towards the right of Maharshi. With folded hands and tearful eyes I stood there, eagerly expecting to catch his eyes. Though some people were asked to pass on to make room for others, I was fortunately not disturbed. I continued standing there, allowing ample room for the free passage of other pilgrims who still continued to pass on. I waited and waited. Mixed emotions pulsed through the body and tears flowed down the cheeks, (I know not why). My whole being was irresistibly being drawn towards him. At last he was turning his head towards his right, that is, in my direction. Expectation rose high, but,

alas, his gaze passed on without falling on me! Frustration further intensified my sense of helplessness and my whole being poured forth silent entreaty in convulsive sobs. Ah! now, immediately after, I seemed to obtain a side glance from his eyes, while a sweet smile beamed on his face. A peculiar sensation passed through my body and my whole being seemed to be churned. A minute later I passed out of the quadrangle.

The next morning, I got up early, and after finishing my bath, attended the morning prayers in the hall. Well-versed Brahmins recited Vedic Hymns. Some slokas offering homage to Maharshi were also recited. All these were done as routine work every morning and evening. After the prayers are over, all assemble in the dining hall and take their breakfast with Maharshi. Maharshi also takes the two principal meals along with all the guests. The same food as is served to Maharshi is also served to one and all present, and he does not allow any discrimination in this matter.

I was eager to put my case before Maharshi and tried to find out somebody who would introduce me to him and speak to him on my behalf. I approached some inmates of the Ashram but every one of them told me that no introduction or intermediary was necessary here, any one could personally approach Maharshi and speak to him directly. But I could not muster sufficient courage to speak to him or rather I did not know what to speak to him. Thus the second day also passed away without my being able to make any contact with him. I had only a few days at my disposal, and two days had already gone. Would this journey, so much trouble and such a cost, would all these be for nothing? These thoughts overwhelmed me and goaded me to offer most earnest prayers.

Next morning, I entreated another inmate of the Ashram to put my case before Maharshi. He looked at me for a moment, and then advised me to write down whatever I intended to say on a piece of paper and to place it before Sri Bhagavan. He also gave me a piece of paper. Write down! What should

I write down? But I was not in a thinking mood then. I wrote down whatever came to my mind. He very kindly took the piece of paper, went to the hall, followed by me, and placed the paper before Maharshi, speaking something to him in Tamil. Maharshi read it and smiled, and smiling he turned towards me. I was sitting there, with folded hands and eyes filled with tears. As he looked at me I was overwhelmed and a violent emotion convulsed my body which set Maharshi laughing. He laughed merrily for some time and then silently folded the paper and left it on a bookshelf which stood nearby. He did not speak to me nor did he seem to pay any further attention to me. The mind cannot remain in a tense state for long; sheer exhaustion calms it down. My mind calmed down after some time. The bell rang summoning us to dinner and we followed Maharshi to the dining hall.

I had placed my case before Maharshi. He did not even speak to me; rather he laughed at me! There was nothing more to be done. I must return home and be a laughing-stock also to my friends and relatives. What could be done? He could not be forced to bestow Grace. With these thoughts the mind became resigned.

After the night meal, the devotees used to spend half an hour in meditation in the hall in Maharshi's presence. Mechanically I followed them and sat with them in the hall. A few minutes passed. Then suddenly I felt a pleasant coolness inundating me. It seemed to emanate from the very bones, cooling the whole being. Is this the spiritual fragrance spoken of as emanating from Maharshi? Whatever it might be, I had no doubt that it came from Maharshi and at his will.

This was on the night of the third day of my visit. On the next day, while sitting before Maharshi, I experienced a sudden pull in the region of the heart. I was astonished and, as I sought to observe it, it passed away. Nothing like the experience of the previous night was repeated. The remainder of the day passed in keen expectation, but nothing happened,

even during the meditation period after the night meal. Perhaps expectation obstructed its manifestation.

Next morning, i.e., on the fifth day of my stay at the Ashram news came of further heavy bombing of the Eastern Coast-line by the Japanese, and I naturally became anxious for my family. Moreover, as I did not experience anything unusual during the meditation periods of the previous night and of that morning, I thought that I had obtained what I deserved and that nothing more would be gained by a further stay at the Ashram. So I decided to return home. In the afternoon I wrote out my intention to go home on a piece of paper and placed it before Maharshi. He read it, silently folded the paper and left it on the shelf. He spoke nothing and did not even look at me. Another rebuff.

I made preparations for my departure, packed up my small belongings and after taking my evening meal requested an inmate of the Ashram to kindly get a carriage for me; but I was told that no carriage would be available at that hour, that I should have informed him earlier so that one might have been fetched from the town. I was thus compelled to stay at the Ashram for another day.

Next morning, I attended the usual prayers. I did not experience anything abnormal during the meditation period. Discussions generally take place when they assemble in the hall after breakfast. Maharshi also answers questions from earnest seekers. That morning also discussions were going on. As they were talking mostly in Tamil (a language not known to me) my attention was not attracted till I found some people turning their heads and laughing at me. On enquiry I learnt that they were discussing the subject-matter of my first letter to Maharshi. Evidently, he had spoken something to them regarding this letter. Though made a laughing-stock, I was still glad to find that he had at last taken notice of me. I took part in the discussions and, as I was in the back row, some distance away from them, they asked me to come



nearer so that there might not be any difficulty in following each other, and I obeyed. I was thus brought very near Maharshi's seat. Our discussions over, I heard Maharshi say, "He is concentrating on the reflection and complains that he cannot see the original." It struck me forcefully. What did he mean by reflection and what was the original? I shut my eyes and tried to find out the meaning. Immediately after, I felt a pull in the region of the heart, similar to what I felt two days previously but much stronger in intensity. My mind was completely arrested stilled, but I was wide awake. Suddenly, without any break in my consciousness, the "I" flashed forth! It was self-awareness, pure and simple, steady, unbroken and intensely bright, as much brighter than ordinary consciousness as is sunlight brighter than the dim light of a lamp. In ordinary consciousness the 'I'-sense dimly remains in the background, as a matter of inference or intuition, the whole of the consciousness being occupied by the object. Here, 'I' came to the foreground, occupied, or rather became, the whole consciousness and intensely existed as pure consciousness, displacing all objects. I was, but I was neither the subject nor the object of this consciousness. I WAS this consciousness, which alone existed. There were no objects. The world was not, neither the body nor the mind no thought, no motion; time also ceased to exist. I alone existed and that I was consciousness itself, self-luminous and alone, without a second.... Suddenly, and again without any break in my consciousness, I was brought back to my normal, ordinary consciousness.

A great miracle had been performed in broad daylight in the presence of so many people, without their knowing it. No argument of the greatest philosophers and scientists of the world will now make me doubt the possibility of experiencing the 'I' in its pure state or pure consciousness, without any subject-object relationship. Of course, I myself had not the least inkling of such a state even a second earlier, and I never expected to get such an experience. I, an insignificant

creature, wallowing in the mud of mundane existence, and without any sadhana, being granted this supreme experience, an experience which is rarely obtained even by great Yogis after most austere spiritual practices strenuously performed for ages together. Such is the wonder of His Grace immeasurable and unfathomable Grace! Truly has it been said ‘Unmasked Thou givest, this is Thy imperishable fame.’

As soon as I was brought to my normal consciousness, I opened my eyes and looked at Maharshi. I knew from the heart of my heart that it was Maharshi who had very graciously granted me this experience, but he appeared to be quite unconcerned, as if nothing had happened! He was not even looking at me! How could he have performed this miracle? Was it by his Silence? Is this then what is meant by – Sanskrit Text Sanskrit Text Through Silence is revealed the nature of Parabrahma by the Guru. Who can comprehend?

The experience so much amazed me that I even forgot to express my heart-felt gratitude to Maharshi. I could not at that time even properly evaluate this supreme experience. I looked at my comrades. They did not seem to notice me, and so were ignorant of what had happened. In like manner, unknown to others, to how many people has he graciously granted this and even higher experiences? He only knows. I looked at the clock, it was 20 minutes past ten. But as I did not look at the clock before this state supervened, I cannot say for how long I was in this wonderful state. A little later we followed Maharshi to the dining hall and took our meal.

The experience left a very cheerful mood in me. I felt completely carefree. The thought of home or of bombing did not trouble me any further and I thought of staying in the Ashram for a few days more. But man only proposes. Just after the night meal was over a certain gentleman came to me and said that he had already arranged a conveyance for me and a carriage was waiting for me at the gate to take me to the station! I was a little offended. Who asked him to bring a carriage? I had given up the idea of leaving the

Ashram today. But why should I blame him? He was present on the previous night when I asked for a carriage and saw my plight at not being able to start home for want of a carriage. In order that the same thing might not happen again he had very kindly taken upon himself the duty of helping me by arranging for a carriage. How could he be aware of the change which had come over me? Moreover, he was only an instrument. I therefore said nothing to him. He took me to Maharshi, introduced me to him and explained to him that I was leaving for home. I prostrated myself before Maharshi, took leave of him and started for the station. The previous day I had decided to go but was compelled to stay; this day I decided to stay but was compelled to go! Mysterious are His ways!

### **103. Maha Nirvana**

**T**he unique manifestation of Divine Grace on earth known and loved by us as Bhagavan Sri Ramana receded into its Reality as night set in on Friday, April 14th, 1950. The very moment that Bhagavan entered into Maha Nirvana, at 8:47 p.m., the skies announced the great event with a long, slow trail of light.

Bhagavan Ramana moved with us, as one of us, though he had, even as a lad of 17, found his Unity with the Reality underlying all appearance and had remained ever since as that resplendent Pure Consciousness, the Self. Though he never left Arunachala after his first arrival there, the power of his Light spread silently through the world during the half century and more of his stay there. Many earnest seekers approached him, and some found spiritual illumination in his presence. His mode of life was natural, his ways were gracious, his smile brought peace to the heart. His look was an initiation into Divine Mystery; his teaching was simple, direct and

profound, based on man's natural experience of I-ness. He directed all to seek and find for themselves the Source of the ego, the Reality behind their individuality, from which all thoughts and actions proceed. His luminous abidance in the Self was itself a teaching conveyed from heart to heart in silence. As all his actions were waves from the Light within, the grace of which attracted and uplifted all who came in contact with him.\*

### **Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal**

I was at Rajapalayam at the time of Bhagavan's *Maha Nirvana*. That night, I saw a beautiful blue light going up in the sky and I knew Bhagavan had left the body. I did not want to live after that and so I started fasting, hoping to drop the body that way. For five or six days, I did not touch food. But during that time, I had several visions, and in one of them, I was taken inside a cave on the Hill and saw Rishis performing Yagnas. Sri Bhagavan was seated there. Bhagavan said, "Why are you crying? You say that I have gone away, but where have I gone? I am here." Some Rishis brought some Prasad to Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan took some and gave it to me. I could not remember in the dream that I was fasting. For five days afterwards, the smell of that Prasad was with me. Now was that a dream or reality? I consider it to be Bhagavan's Grace.

The aroma of that Prasad even spread around my house. My brother wondered what I had eaten. That aroma was simply out-of-the-world. The morning after the dream, I started taking food and coffee. My brother and sister were also fasting with me, deciding to give up their bodies if I were to give up mine. In the dream, Bhagavan was seated near a tank and Kamadhenu (the celestial cow) was near him. Rishis and Munis were serving him. Bhagavan was looking splendid, like Lord Siva. It was a divine sight indeed. The

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\* *The Last Days and Maha-Nirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.*

smell of the Prasad remained for five days. How can I take it to be a dream? From that day onwards, I had no thought at all that Bhagavan had left us. He is all pervading. I felt no more sorrow in my heart. He is here too. See how we all are gathered here. What have we done to deserve this?\*

### **Major Chadwick**

**O**n the last night, Bhagavan was lying in the small room which had originally been built as a storeroom when he had moved into the big hall. We were all seated along the verandah of the temple opposite. Our only view of the room was through a small ventilator window about six feet from the ground. Naturally, seated as we were on the ground, we had no view of the interior of the room where he lay; all we could see was the constant movement of a fan backwards and forwards. This fan was anxiously watched by everybody, for when it stopped we would know that the end had come.

The Ashram authorities were afraid that there might be some trouble from the waiting crowds, as a certain clique had arranged, if possible, to remove the body and bury it outside the Ashram. It would have been quite impossible to do this. There were lots of police about and the majority of opinion was naturally against such a scandal. However, the powers were scared. For this reason, about an hour before the end the D.M.O., who was present, was prompted by the Manager to come out and announce that there was no immediate danger of anything happening that night. It was a scandalous thing to do. Naturally many of the people went home for their evening meal and so missed the last moments.

There were some American reporters and photographers, who were there just out for a scoop. They were living less than half a mile away. One of them standing outside the house suddenly looked up and saw a very bright star or meteor move slowly across the sky towards the North over the top of the

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\* Videotaped, Arunachala Ashrama.

Hill. He called out to the rest of the party, who ran out and saw the same phenomenon. One and all agreed that something had happened to Bhagavan. Even though they were without special faith in him, by some intuition they were certain that this must have been the case. It happened exactly at the time of the passing (8:47 p.m. on April 14th, 1950) and was seen by many people, all of whom strangely enough, associated it with the same thing. People in Madras also saw it and some got into their cars immediately and made their way to the Ashram. This is a fact which I will not attempt to explain, but must accept it as it happened.

“Go! Where can I go? I shall always be here.”

The power of Sri Ramana, who gave up his physical form has not diminished. He is everywhere, like the light in a room shed by an electric bulb. But the light is found to be far stronger near the bulb, the source of light, than in any other part of the room, though no spot is in darkness. What wonder, then, if the power of our Guru is found near the place where his body is interred?\*

### **Attendant Krishnaswami**

Bhagavan gave several indications that he wanted no treatment. One day he threatened to drop his body by not eating anything. I pleaded with Bhagavan that I would take care of all his bodily needs, and that he should eat and stay put inside that room. One day Bhagavan refused to drink water, but the next day he demanded huge amounts of water. I pleaded with him to moderate his intake of food and water. So many things like this happened in those last days.

Two days after he drank lots of water, the end was to come. I was with him on that day, too. In the afternoon, I gave him the essence of pomegranate, which Bhagavan could swallow. At 5 o'clock in the evening Satyananda Swami gave

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\* Major A.W. Chadwick, *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi*.

him orange juice, which was advised by the doctors, but Bhagavan had some difficulty swallowing it.

On the day of the *Maha Samadhi*, O.P. Ramaswami Reddiyar, the retired Chief Minister, was attending to the affairs of the Ashram. A police officer came to inquire about Bhagavan's condition on behalf of the District Police Superintendent, who wanted to have Bhagavan's darshan. I told him to ask the *Sarvadhikari*. They said that only I would be able to give them the correct picture. So I told them that as far as I was concerned, I did not think Bhagavan's body would last beyond 10 o'clock in the night. So they sent word to the District Police Superintendent to come and see Bhagavan.

There was another problem. Devotees wanted to have the darshan of their Guru. I did not want to incur their anger by denying them one last darshan of their Guru. I requested them to come in a queue and not put any questions or expect any words of wisdom from Bhagavan. Darshan continued till 5 p.m. Devotees came in large numbers, and although police kept the line moving fast, they went back and stood in line again, weeping and crying. It was a sight that moved me very deeply.

Seeing the difficulty that Bhagavan was experiencing, I drew a screen across and didn't allow any more darshan. O.P. Ramaswami Reddiyar came, and I told him that he could come in, but he declined. Seeing how much Bhagavan's body was suffering, O.P. Reddiyar requested the devotees to sing *Aksharamanamalai*. He did this because Bhagavan's body was suffering and he didn't want anybody to notice it.

Bhagavan had told me that a *Jnani* does not mind how his body is dropped, for the body idea has already died. It was only for the naked eye that Bhagavan was suffering. In reality there was no suffering since Bhagavan had no *dehatma buddhi* (I-am-the-body idea). Lots of pillows were placed to prop up his head and He was sitting with his legs stretched. Suddenly, Bhagavan asked me to seat him in *padmasana* pose, and in that pose the last breath went out of him, and he became still.

When Bhagavan dropped the body, I was holding the head, and Subramanian was standing next to me. I was looking at Bhagavan's face, and when the lower jaw dropped, I knew that he had left the body. The women outside sensed it somehow and, beating their breasts, tried to come inside and have one last darshan. But the police prevented it. I helped carry the body to the *Mantapam* of the mother's temple. My service to Bhagavan ended there.\*

### S.S. Cohen

5th April: Yesterday, Monsieur Cartier-Brassen, the expert French photographer, took a photograph of Sri Bhagavan, which may prove to be the last one of him.

Maharshi's health has remained more or less stationary since about a week. His nausea and scanty urination have not been persistent, yet there has been no improvement in his general condition, which continues to prevent his coming out for darshan.

Yesterday morning, His Excellency the Governor of Madras, the Maharaja of Bhavnagar, and his wife had Sri Bhagavan's darshan in the small room, then worshipped in the Ashram's temple, inquired after the two white peacocks they had presented some weeks back and left.

6th April, 1950: Symptoms of definite toxæmia have set in Maharshi's body. For the whole day his urinary secretion did not exceed one ounce.... Doctors gently argue with him that scanty urination can be relieved only by an increased intake of fruit juice and water. 'And if I can't take?' he would answer, and there the matter must end. He leaves his body to manage its health or diseases as best it can, without the slightest effort of cooperation on his part. His mind is ever sunk in bliss. It is true that his body is suffering, but that is no reason why he should disturb his mind to oblige it. If it dies, well and good; if it remains, so much the worse for it: it is

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\* Videotaped, Arunachala Ashrama.



the business of Him who made it to keep or take it away and do all the worrying; it is none of his own business to interfere and inconvenience himself on its behalf.

13th April, 1950: Tamil New Year, 2 p.m.

Morning observations: Maharshi's diastole climbed up to 46, but the systole remained stationary at 68, pulse 94, temperature 98.4 (normal! what an irony!), breathing 22 per minute.

Morning darshan ran for half an hour, during which Maharshi's eyes remained closed and when he occasionally opened them, they looked in front rather than to the left where the devotees were filing past him. His diet consists now of only buttermilk.

10 p.m.: Owing to the very heavy attendance of visitors from all over the South, nearly 1500, the evening darshan had to be lengthened to 45 minutes.

Many devotees remained till late in the evening to receive the final medical oral report for the day. At 9:30, Dr. Krishnamurti, a local physician and a great devotee, walked up to me and said: 'My own impression is that there is no immediate danger. Bhagavan has just told the attendants to go to sleep as he himself was going to do. His breathing is not laboured, and there is no gasping in evidence.'

Friday, 14th April: Maharshi is in a very precarious condition. The whole morning has been spent by devotees in hushed gloom and with bated breath. After evening darshan, the unanimous verdict is that it is positively the last. The Master is now propped on large pillows, almost in a sitting posture, the head resting backward with open mouth, and two attendants briskly fanning him, to enable him to breathe freely-the battle for air, has thus started. At 7 p.m., oxygen is administered to him for about five minutes, but seeing that it gave him no relief, he feebly asked that it should be stopped.

The situation was tense: about five-hundred devotees were outside in sad expectation of the solemn last moment. Blood relations, Ashram workers, a few old disciples, and

some new aspirants went in by turn to have a last sight of him. When the end was known to be approaching, the whole congregation with one voice started chanting the Tamil hymns he had many years ago composed in praise of Lord Arunachala: “Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala!” till it came at about 8:47. Many devotees, grief-stricken and beating their breasts, lost control of their feelings and rushed *en masse* to the small room where the sacred body lay, but police officers immediately cordoned off the area till it was brought out and placed in the centre of the big darshan hall in yoga asana for all the people to pay their last respects to it. The news spread like wildfire to the town and the neighbouring villages and drew huge crowds. By 9:15, the crowd grew so thick, that it became necessary to give a chance to all to pay their homage and pass the body in an orderly manner. A queue was thus formed-seven to ten broad-at a quick-march pace. It is still (11:55 p.m.) continuing unabatingly.

Around the sofa sat dozens of disciples, some chanting Maharshi’s verses and other devotional hymns, but others remained in silent contemplation. Sandalwood paste and jasmine flowers now cover the body and incense burns by its side.

At about 9 p.m., Monsieur Henri Cartier-Bresson, the French photographer, who has been here for about a fortnight with his wife, related an experience of his to me. “It is a most astonishing experience,” he said. “I was in the open space in front of my house, when my friends drew my attention to the sky, where I saw a vividly-luminous shooting star with a luminous tail, unlike any shooting star I had before seen, coming from the South, moving slowly across the sky and, reaching the top of Arunachala, disappeared behind it. Because of its singularity we all guessed its import and immediately looked at our watches – it was 8:47 – and then raced to the Ashram only to find that our premonition had been only too sadly true; the Master had passed into *Maha Nirvana* at that very minute.” Several other devotees in the

Ashram and in the town later told me that they too had seen the tell-tale meteor.\*

## 104. Readiness†

The burning regret which many, probably, share with me, is that full advantage was not taken of those happy and precious days when He was with us physically also – eating, talking, laughing, welcoming all, open to all. Reality was there, in abundance and for the taking, but we enclosed ourselves in timidity, in false humility, in self-deprecation and false excuses. We took a cupful when the ocean was at our feet.

Now He is still with us, but no longer so easily accessible. To find Him again we must overcome the very obstacles which prevented us from seeing Him as He was and going with Him where He wanted to take us. It was *tamas* and *rajas* – fear and desire that stood in the way – the desire for the pleasure of the past and fear of austere responsibility of a higher state of being. It was the same old story – the threshold of maturity of mind and heart which most of us refuse to cross. ‘Ripeness is all’, He used to say, and now ripeness is the condition of finding Him again.

We ripen when we refuse to drift, when striving ceaselessly becomes a way of life, when dispassion born of insight becomes spontaneous. When the search ‘Who Am I?’ becomes the only thing that matters, when we become a mere torch and the flame all-important, it will mean that we are ripening fast. We cannot accelerate that ripening, but we can remove the obstacles of fear and greed, indolence and fancy,

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\* *Guru Ramana*.

† Bharatananda ‘Maurice Frydman’, *The Mountain Path*, April 1976.

prejudice and pride. He is there and waiting – timelessly. It is we who keep Him waiting.

### 105. Visiting the Ashram after Maha Nirvana\*

One of the great regrets of my life is the loss of a letter, which I received in 1934. It was in reply to a rather hysterical missive I had dispatched addressed “Personal and Private” to Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai. This communication dealt with a serious, self-admitted weakness of mine, which was my mother’s despair – a combustible temper which would explode at the slightest provocation. It was a bad time for me. I had just lost a father I had worshipped. I was twelve going thirteen.

I desperately needed a confidante, an adviser, somebody preferably outside the family and out of the blue the name of Ramana Maharshi came to me. His was the only name I had ever heard my father – a stubborn, intolerant sceptic – mention without any codicils. I decided, therefore, to write to the sage of Tiruvannamalai secretly. After a number of unsuccessful attempts, I finally sent off a letter asking the Maharshi directly to please I beg of you help me with my temper problem. Within a week I received a reply signed by the *Sarvadhikari*, informing me that my letter had been received and placed before the Maharshi and that his message to me was that if I myself made a constant and earnest effort to overcome my temper I would rid myself of it, and that he sent me his blessings. My first reaction to that letter was one of astonishment at being treated like a grown up, since I had always been told what to do, guided, instructed, warned, but never challenged except on Sports Day. And here was this great guru as good as telling me: “It is your temper, isn’t it? So, you yourself deal with it.” He had simply batted the ball

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\* Santha Rangachary, *The Mountain Path*, Apr. 1980.

back to my court in the nicest possible way by treating me as an individual in my own right. I rather liked that.

Ramana Maharshi entered my life again a year or so later when my sister took our whole family on a pilgrimage. The whole thing was going to take less than a week and we were to stay at Tiruvannamalai only for two days. But as it turned out we stayed at Ramanasramam for the whole week and I wept like a lost child when we had to leave. The visit to Ramanasramam was a shattering experience for me. I do believe I literally fell in love with Ramana Maharshi. I was in a daze, a trance, my tongue was gone, my mind was gone, and I was in a state of dumbfounded ecstasy. This love, which had been awakened, was the kind, which totally bypasses the physical and creates an awareness of a different kind of consciousness which can only be described as a mindless rapture, pure joy. It is an unlocated, pervasive state of being sparked off by some kind of recognition and it stays with you and you are never the same again.

We arrived at Tiruvannamalai just before dawn. After reaching the Ashram we bathed and had our breakfast, and then made our way to the hall. My mother, brother and sister went ahead and quickly disappeared into the hall. I hung back, unaccountably apprehensive. Then, as I at last composed myself and got to the door and looked in, I saw reclining on a sofa, a golden-brown figure with the most radiant countenance I had ever seen before or since and, as I stood there riveted to the spot, the Maharshi turned and looked at me. When I remember it even now, more than forty years later, tears come to my eyes as they did then. I stood there, God knows how long, just looking at that face. Then, as in a trance, I moved forward deliberately towards him and touched his feet. Fighting my way through the disapproving glances that followed, I then made my way to a place near the window. Once I was seated I let my tears flow. I remember I spent a good part of that morning wiping my eyes. They were not tears of grief nor were they tears of joy. Maybe they

were for something which I saw in the Maharshi fleetingly and which I also want and shall forever seek. Yes, I cried for myself then and I still do it now.

Never before had I seen in a human countenance a more intense, inward life and yet one which remained so transparent and childlike. There was about him an irresistible and indefinable spiritual power, which simply overwhelmed me. I was conscious of people sitting all around me but was totally incurious about them. After an hour or so of silence I suddenly felt like singing. Without hesitation or embarrassment, I lifted my 12-year-old voice in a rendition of Thyagaraja's *Vinanok koni Yunnanura*, keeping time softly with my fingers on my knee. The audience sat still and unresponsive. The total lack of reaction to my performance should in reason have embarrassed me, but I was away in a state of mind, which recognised nobody except that reclining figure on the sofa. After a few minutes I threw myself with another gush of abandon into *Thelisi Rama Chintana*. As I began the *anupallavi* which exhorts the mind to stay still for a moment and realise the true essence of the name Rama, I saw the Maharshi turn his eyes upon me with that impersonal yet arresting look of his, and my heart soared and I thought: I want to be here for ever and ever.

For three hours every morning and every evening my vigil in the hall continued for seven days. After the first day my family had, without any discussion, silently and unanimously changed our planned programme and requested and got extension of residence. I sat in my seat near the window, still and thought free, just gazing at the Maharshi. Occasionally somebody would ask a question and the Maharshi would turn and look at him, and you got the feeling that the question had been answered. Or somebody would ask for the meaning of a particular phrase in a Sanskrit or Tamil stanza, and the Maharshi would answer softly, briefly.

He was not a man of many words. His long years of practised detachment from people made him laconic in

speech. His knowledge of classical Tamil religious literature was considerable; he could himself compose verses and he did. His enlightenment had not been directed by a guru but had come from his own Self-consciousness. It was all there lighting him up from inside and his most effective form of communication was intra personal through the sense of sight and the medium of silence. He was a very human being, who laughed and joked occasionally, but he could suddenly plunge deep into himself while sitting in a hall full of people and rest in that stillness of spirit, which as he himself said, was being in God. One afternoon somebody showed Maharshi some verses written on paper. Maharshi read them, made a brief comment, and then clarified it by narrating a story from *Yoga Vasishta*. I listened – and felt that I could understand the words that were being spoken though I really could not have grasped their meaning. I wondered in retrospect years later when I myself read that book, at the delightful ease and simplicity with which the Maharshi had narrated that story, going straight to the spirit like an aimed arrow, and then lapsing into what I can only describe as a speaking silence. In those eloquent silences that punctuated his brief remarks, one seemed to feel unspoken thought flowing around the room touching and drawing everybody into its illuminating course. That was a strange experience to me, that in the presence of Maharshi speech seemed redundant. I was totally and blissfully satisfied just being in his presence.

That whole week we spent in the Ashram. I practically did nothing else but sit in that hall. We attended the Vedic recitals at dawn of the students of the Ashram pathasala. My brother and I watched every morning the Maharshi's gangly walk up and down the Hill and I remember, on one memorable occasion, the gentle sage himself smilingly stood still for a couple of minutes as he saw my brother adjusting his camera. I had never before spent so many days talking so little, just sitting around so much, or so lost in a single-minded pursuit of the Maharshi. The evening we finally left my brother and

I kept coming back to look at the Maharshi “Just one more time” as he sat in the enclosed veranda beside the hall having a light oil massage. I finally said: “We will go only after he turns his head and looks at us once more.” After a minute or two the Maharshi turned full face towards us and looked at us and without a word we turned and walked away.

I shall not claim that my whole life was transformed after this meeting. No. I went back to school and then to college, got married, set up house, had children, started a journalistic career of mine own. My *grihasthasramam* became my main preoccupation. But my visit to Ramanasramam – had done something to me. It had left a mark on my mind and heart. The picture of the Ashram and of the Maharshi was always in my mind like the background curtain of a stage. Whenever I was tired or dispirited or perplexed the wish to go to Ramanasramam would possess me like a hunger. Even when I was so busy that I did not know whether I was coming or going a sudden look at a picture of the Maharshi hanging on the wall would momentarily root me to the spot and my mind would suddenly go blank.

I did go to Ramanasramam a fortnight before death claimed the Maharshi’s frail human body. Because of the vast crowds which had come to visit him, the Ashram authorities had made special arrangements for everybody to get darshan of the white haired smiling figure who sat on an easy-chair on the veranda of the room in which he later breathed his last. For a brief moment I stood below and looked up at that benign countenance, the eyes so bright and serene, and knew it was the last time I was looking at the living Maharshi.

I went to the Ashram again some years later. As usual, as soon as I passed through the Ashram gates, its peace closed around me and emptied my mind. I sat on a veranda where I had only to turn my head to the left to see the Mountain and bring my eyes back to the samadhi to see in my mind the Maharshi sitting on his sofa. I sat there the whole of that day doing nothing, not reading, not writing, not eating, not



thinking, not remembering, not wondering why it was so quiet or where everybody was. The voice of a young lad who came running through the gate screaming: “Nehru has passed away” was just an incidental sound. During all those hours I never for a moment wanted to be anywhere else or doing anything else.

Whenever I feel I want to go away somewhere, away from home, family, friends, book, mistakes, fears, sorrows, my mind automatically turns to Ramanasramam. And my body follows. I make the journey to Tiruvannmalai, walk into the Ashram, enter the Hall, and I am “home” and totally at peace.

Every human being has really only one guru like one mother. Some are fortunate enough to meet their gurus; some pass them by, like ships in the night. I stumbled upon mine when I was twelve. I now stand alone in myself. In a sense I am twelve going on thirteen all over again, standing on another threshold, remembering, waiting.

## 106. Continued Presence\*

*In this article Mouni Sadhu the author of “In days of great peace” writes about the uninterrupted availability of the Master even after Maha Nirvana.*

Ramana Maharshi left this world after six months after my departure from India. Just before the end, in April 1950, the Master said to those around him: ‘They Say I am dying, but I shall remain here more alive than ever.’ Verily the Spirit of Maharshi has remained with us.

Several of his disciples, residing thousands of miles away from the Ashram, knew of his death on the very same day. Comparing the hour with the time when this news was

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\* Mouni Sadhu.

mystically communicated to them, one would say that it was ‘broadcast’ several hours before Maharshi’s body breathed its last.

Letters took a week or more to come from India and elsewhere and they showed that no true disciple of the Master experienced any grief or despair. The same spiritual atmosphere of a lucid wave of peace and light was felt in the hearts of the pupils, whether abroad or in the Ashram of the Saint.

The sad news of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s departure from the physical body soon reached his other devotees scattered throughout the world and me. I do not wish to praise, or compare with other Masters, the Great Being at whose feet the Almighty allowed me to abide. For how could we, from our lower level of consciousness exactly describe the being whose mission was to give us something of his infinite light? Adequately to assess his greatness, one must at least be on the same level of spiritual glory. All that I can do, is to try to convey what I found in my own heart when I received the news.

The light from those luminous eyes of Sri Maharshi was for ever engraved on my memory before leaving the Ashram. And now – the account of his death lies before me. Does it mean that those eyes cannot radiate their silent initiation anymore? That would be ridiculous. I know this light is not a material one, though it was conveyed through a material body. This is a mystery but not a paradox. In my heart I found no urge to discover that mystery through the mind. I felt that the fact was so, even though inexplicable to the thinking process. So his death did not deprive me of his reality.

I was quietly sitting as if in preparation for meditation. But this time the usual process changed. Perhaps He saw that the human heart, not yet free from all its weaknesses, sometimes needs some consolation. And then, instead of a void, the well-known and beloved picture arose before me.

There were most mysterious and inspiring evenings at the Ashram when the beautiful hymn ‘In Praise of the Lord of the Universe’ was sung in the hall. Sri Maharshi evidently loved the hymn, for there would appear a peculiar expression of other than human beatitude and delight on His face. I felt that the hearts of those who were present in that blissful hour of the evening contemplation were deeply tuned to it. Perhaps His penetrating inner sight saw the beneficial process in us, and His silent blessing was the answer.

How can we fathom the unfathomable? And now, as if still in the temple hall with all those others, I once again listened to the same beautiful melody heard before with my outer ears. It was as if I reviewed a film. And there was no sadness any more. It could not be otherwise! The true legacy of the Master could never be less than joy, this sublime and silent joy of being, untroubled by the waves of the surrounding illusory world or Maya. This was His peace which He bequeathed to us.

Later on letters came from devotees in other countries. My distant friends each gave their own accounts of how the tragic news affected them. They tried their best to console themselves and me, by saying that the physical departure of the Master could not break our spiritual link with Him. And yet the ink in the last paragraphs of such letters was often blurred as if with tears.

It is said that love was the force which created the universe. Perhaps it is. But to me the force of such unselfish and radiant love as His is just that power which purifies our hearts, when all other methods prove useless.

Neither occult training nor any other method, can give the disciple the true peace which the Master gives.

Sri Maharshi was a centre of love to his disciples. He left us his love, and where else in the world could be found a purifying power such as this, to bring peace to our hearts?

The photographs of Maharshi are now known all over the world. But how many people know the light which was

brought by him from the realm of absolute bliss, the land of the highest spirit, and of the thorny paths, which are so narrow and difficult for most of us? Why are we so blind? Why are we unable to see this peace and bliss, wisdom and love expressed so clearly even in the physical features of one who abides in that land forever? How much more resplendent must be that light there, where the vehicles of matter does not veil it, where shines the never setting sun, about whose luminous rays every being dreams in the innermost depths of his heart.

The anniversaries of the *Maha Samadhi* of Sri Maharshi will come one after another. And some year will see the last one for me on this earth.

But at the last moment He will be with me, as with every one of you who knew Him, and you who yearn to know Him, if you keep to the end, His legacy of love.

Sri Maharshi says: ‘He that has earned the grace of the Guru shall undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger’s jaws will never be allowed to escape’. In other words, once the path is found it cannot be lost any more, no matter how many lives still lie before us.

It is my firm conviction, that in this world at the present time, there are still many who would be able to enter on this sublime path, the unique direct highway to the absolute.

## 107. Ramana Still Lives

*In this article Arthur Osborne writes about the continued presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi.*

**S**ri Ramana Maharshi has passed away.... Even so, we would still remember him with all the love we are capable of, we would still celebrate his *Jayanti* as a miracle of grace bestowed upon us, but it would all be past history. For the

benefit and the reassurance of any who may feel doubts on the subject, I wish to record here that Bhagavan himself gave an answer to the question.

When the sickness that had gripped his body threatened already to be fatal, some devotee besought him to put it away from him and to will his recovery and continued life for their sake. Their plea was that they were utterly dependent on him that they needed his continued grace and guidance and could not carry on their sadhana without him.

Bhagavan's answer was curt and to the point. All that he said to them was: "You attach too much importance to the body." This then is the final and conclusive answer. Bhagavan's own answer to those who think that he lives in any less real way since the body's death, that his guidance is in any way broken or weakened, that he is in any less complete sense the Sat-Guru; they attach too much importance to the body.

The grace at Arunachala is so potent, so vibrant today, so searching and intimate in its effect, that one wonders whether those who find a change in it have been there to see. Some there were who even formerly were insensitive to Bhagavan's grace, but it is not a question of such people here, since he who complains of having lost a treasure must once have possessed it or at least part of it. Those who found nothing formerly can complain of having lost nothing now. And yet, those who really possessed the treasure know that they have lost nothing.

What, then, is the difference today? There is a difference, and its reality none can deny. Indeed, who most feel the present guidance are, on the whole, those who most enjoyed the graciousness of Bhagavan's physical manifestation. The very receptivity to his grace which made them so susceptible to the beauty of his physical form, so apprehensive of losing it, in some cases even so despondent to think what would ensue, makes them now aware of his continued Presence. There is difference: the beloved voice is not heard nor the divine form seen; but this has become strangely unimportant to those who

had thought they would feel it most. For they have found a lightness and a happiness in the very air of Tiruvannamalai, an immaculate peace beyond the rough handling of destiny, an immortal wealth despite their loss.

But is this the same as actual guidance by Bhagavan? It is, and in the most direct and personal way. Indeed the guidance seems more active now than formerly. Particularly in those people who meditated little before but were contented rather to feast their eyes upon him and listen to the sound of his voice, are now being drawn more and more to sit in silent meditation before the Samadhi and to gather together in the old hall redolent with his presence. As one sits there, it is nothing vague or diffused that one feels, but the same intense inner stirring, the same lifting up, the same blissful certainty that was felt under his watchful eye. There is the same variation from day to day in mode and potency of guidance, the same response to devotion and to any earnest plea for help.

But, it may be asked, cannot this be felt elsewhere? Is Bhagavan now confined to Tiruvannamalai? He never was. His grace flowed out upon all who turned to him. To imply that the guidance was confined to Tiruvannamalai either now or formerly would indeed be attaching too much importance to the body. Now, as formerly, it is felt in the heart of the devotee independent of all outer aids; but it is also true that now, as formerly, there is great beauty and potency in a visit to Tiruvannamalai. Many have compared it to the recharging of their spiritual battery and the comparison is no less apt now than it used to be. Although, Bhagavan goes out to all who invoke him, he is no less gracious now than formerly to those who make the effort to come to him at Tiruvannamalai. One feels there that he is pouring out an abundance of grace of which there are all too few recipients.

At this time of *Jayanti* we celebrate the birth of him who is deathless. Many are able to pay their homage at Tiruvannamalai as of old. Others gather together in groups in

whatever town or country they may be; and some give praise alone with Bhagavan in the secrecy of their heart. Those who are sensitive and watch the signs feel that the force we now celebrate is waxing, not waning. The numbness that overtook many after the Master's apparent departure is wearing off. A gladness of response is replacing it. The guidance to which they respond is growing so potent, so intimate, that for any to deny its existence causes them the same surprise as if a blind man were to deny that the sun is shining.

"I am not going away," Bhagavan said. "Where could I go? I am here." He is here at Tiruvannamalai, here in the hearts of his devotees. He is Bhagavan, the Inner Guru, the Self that guides to the Self.

### **108. Sri Ramanasramam Today\***

There are so many spiritual centres in India that not only the foreign tourist but even the Indian devotee may well be excused for wondering which one to visit. However, it is not simply a question of duplication; each one has its own specific character, so that while one meets the need of one person, another provides a haven to someone else. First of all, comes the question of the aim of a spiritual centre, because this decides the sort of people who are likely to be attracted to it. The Maharshi was clearly and solely concerned with guiding people towards Liberation or Self-realisation, that is to moksha. But is this not the case with every Ashram and holy place? Not at all. There are places where people go to pray for a son or a job, to win a lawsuit or pass an examination, to obtain release from sickness or misfortune.

I do not say that no such prayers are ever answered at Ramanasramam, but I do say that the Maharshi did not approve of such motives in those who came to him. Rather, he

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\* Arthur Osborne.

tried to awaken in them the realisation that they were not the suffering body but the eternally blissful Self and thereby to give them serenity even in misfortune. There are also places where people go in the hope of developing powers, obtaining visions of the deity, reading people's thoughts, curing sickness, and so forth. To all such aspirants the Maharshi was even more discouraging. Not only do such powers not lead to Liberation, but they can actually be an impediment to it, since men become just as attached to them, or to the desire for them, as to worldly wealth and power.

All this implies that Ramanasramam is not a place visited by large crowds in search of transient gains. Rather, it is for the serious aspirant who has understood that Liberation is the supreme goal and who seeks the grace and support of the Master to guide him on his way.

Even if the goal is agreed upon, there are various paths or disciplines for approaching it. The Maharshi taught the path of Self-enquiry – Who am I? This is not investigating the mind, conscious or subconscious, but seeking the Self underlying the mind. Therefore, he said: "There can be no answer to the question; whatever answer the mind gives must be wrong." The answer comes as an awakening of pure consciousness, a current of awareness in the heart.

This is pure *jnana*, but the Maharshi also taught a path of bhakti. He often said: "There are two ways: ask yourself 'Who am I?' or submit." A philosopher could easily prove that these two paths are mutually exclusive. If you seek to realise your identity with the One Universal Self, which is the Absolute, you logically cannot worship a Personal God or Guru at the same time. Logically not, but in real life you can, because you have different moods and are helped by different kinds of approach. Therefore, in spite of logic, the Maharshi said that the two paths are not incompatible; and his devotees have found it so.

It will be seen that both these paths are direct inner disciplines, independent of ritual; so here we have another



characteristic of Ramanasramam. There is a minimum of ritual and organisation there. People go and sit silent in meditation before the Maharshi's shrine or in the hall where he sat for so many years with his devotees. They walk on the sacred mountain, Arunachala, or sit in their rooms. They visit or talk. They arrange to take their meals at the Ashram or prepare their own food, as they choose. There is scarcely any outer discipline. The Vedas are chanted in front of the shrine, morning and evening, as they used to be in the Maharshi's presence in his lifetime, but even for this attendance is not compulsory. And those who do attend sit together, shoulder to shoulder, brahmin and non-brahmin, Hindu and foreigner, which would not please those who make a fetish of orthodoxy. This, however, does not imply laxity; the discipline comes from within.

Pure *jnana marga* and pure *bhakti marga* though it is, the Maharshi's path contains a strong element of *karma marga* also, since he expects his devotees to follow it in the life of the world. Time and again someone would come to him and ask his authorisation to renounce the world, and he would not give it. "Why do you think you are a householder? The similar thought that you are a sannyasin will haunt you even if you go forth as one. Whether you continue in the household or renounce it and go to live in the forest, your mind haunts you. The ego is the source of thought. It creates the body and the world and makes you think of being a householder. If you renounce, it will only substitute the thought of renunciation for that of the family and the environment of the forest for that of the household. But the mental obstacles are always there for you. They even increase greatly in the new surroundings. Change of environment is no help. The one obstacle is the mind, and this must be overcome whether in the home or in the forest. If you can do it in the forest, why not in the home? So why change the environment?"

How does this affect Ramanasramam? In the first place, it means that there are few sadhus or sannyasins to be found

there. Also, not many of the Maharshi's devotees live there permanently. Most of them pursue their professional life in the world, practising his sadhana invisibly, without form or ritual, and only coming to Tiruvannamalai from time to time, to recharge the batteries, so to speak. Thinking of them, a doctor, an engineer, a professor, a bank manager, an editor, a cinema proprietor and many others come to mind. When it becomes appropriate for one of them to retire from active life in the world and settle down at Tiruvannamalai, circumstances become propitious. It just happens so. Visitors tend, therefore, to be such as have pledged their life to silent, invisible sadhana while performing their obligations in the world, and who seek the grace of the Maharshi, the power of his support, to aid them in doing so.

Another result of the formless, essential nature of the Maharshi's path is the large proportion of foreigners both among the visitors and the resident devotees. There is no need to be a Hindu to follow it. Anyone, whatever religion he professes, whether he professes any formal religion or not, can practise Self-enquiry or can worship and submit. Therefore, the Maharshi never expected any of his devotees to change from one religion to another. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Parsis came to him, as well as Hindus. Some continued to practise the forms of their religions, others not; it was up to them.

Mr. Evans-Wentz, the well-known writer on Tibetan Buddhism, visited the Maharshi and asked whether he recommended any special methods for Europeans, and he replied: "It depends on the mental equipment of the individual. There are no hard and fast rules." Each aspirant was guided and helped according to his aptitude, not on any basis of race, caste, sex or religion.

While the present article was being written, it so happened that the Ashram received a letter from an American woman who never saw the Maharshi, and indeed has never been to India, containing the following message: "Great blessing and

benediction was unexpectedly mine. At 7 a.m., just before waking, a vivid vision of Maharshi, potent and powerful, was vouchsafed briefly to me, in colour. Yes, I know visions are not our aim and goal. However, the depth of surrender, ecstasy, awe, wave after wave, deeper and deeper – wave after wave of Bliss ineffable – was overwhelming, wonderful and encouraging: almost all vestige of mind was gone. The veil into Self was delicate, tenuous thin. Of course, thankful, humble and grateful, my dedication deepens greatly after this. The import and impact of it is with me still.”

Is it any wonder that people turn to him from all parts of the world? Even from behind the Iron Curtain letters come. Normally, it has been possible for any spiritual aspirant in any religion to find guidance within the framework of his own tradition. Today it is no longer easy, if at all possible, to find a guide in any religion who has himself attained the heights and can guide others thereto. Nor is it easy, even if one had such a guide, to follow any strictly orthodox path in the conditions of the modern world. However, the divine grace always provides an answer to man's needs, and in this age has appeared on earth the supreme guide, bringing a path to be followed invisibly by anyone who gives his heart to it.

The Maharshi often reminded those who came to him that they were not the body. Now there are those who presume that he was the body and, no longer seeing his body at Tiruvannamalai, take it that he is not there. But not those who have felt in their hearts the power and subtlety of his guidance, the vibrant, all-pervading peace of Arunachala, the sacred mountain at whose foot his Ashram is located. He used to say: “The purpose of the outer Guru is only to awaken the inner Guru in the Heart.” And shortly before leaving the body he told a group of devotees: “When the Guru has awakened the inner Guru in the heart of his devotees, he is free to leave the body.”

Yes, it may be said, that is all very well for those who were already his devotees when he shed the body, but what

about those others who approach him now and feel the need for an outer Guru? It may be that in some cases he influences them indirectly through those older disciples in whom the inner Guru has been awakened. Certain it is that in many cases he influences them directly and powerfully, as with the American lady from whose letter I have quoted (though not necessarily with any dream or vision).

A visitor asked once whether the contact with the Guru would continue after the dissolution of his physical body and he replied: “The Guru is not the physical form, so contact will remain even after his physical form vanishes.” If it be asked how he can guide individuals or perform any function after having become One with the Absolute, the answer is: in the first place, he has not become One with the Absolute but simply realised his preexisting and eternal Oneness. In the second place, he had already realised this Oneness while wearing the body and was universal then, as he is now. He himself told us that death makes no difference to the *jnani*. The only way of understanding how the *jnani*, who is universal, can perform an individual function is to become one.

Therefore, when people asked him such questions he would usually reply: “Never mind about the *jnani*; first find out who you are.” And when you have done that fully you are the *jnani*. But surely this continued guidance after leaving the body is unusual! Yes, it is unusual; but who is to bind Divine Providence with regulations? The circumstances also are unusual. I have remarked how the formless path the Maharshi prescribed compensates for the modern difficulty in finding adequate guidance within the forms of any religion; similarly, the invisible Guru may compensate for the modern difficulty in finding a fully potent living Guru on earth. Such explanations are for those who like to speculate; for those who are content to strive on the path, guidance is there.

This invisible guidance also has an effect on the Ashram. It means that many or most of those who come, both from India and abroad, are new people who never saw the Maharshi

in his lifetime but have been drawn to him in various ways since then.

The conclusion, then, is that if you are a ritualist or strict formalist, if you crave material boons, if you seek visions or powers, there are other places better suited to you than Ramanasramam. But if you have understood the ultimate spiritual goal of liberation and seek grace and guidance on the path, you will find it at Ramanasramam.

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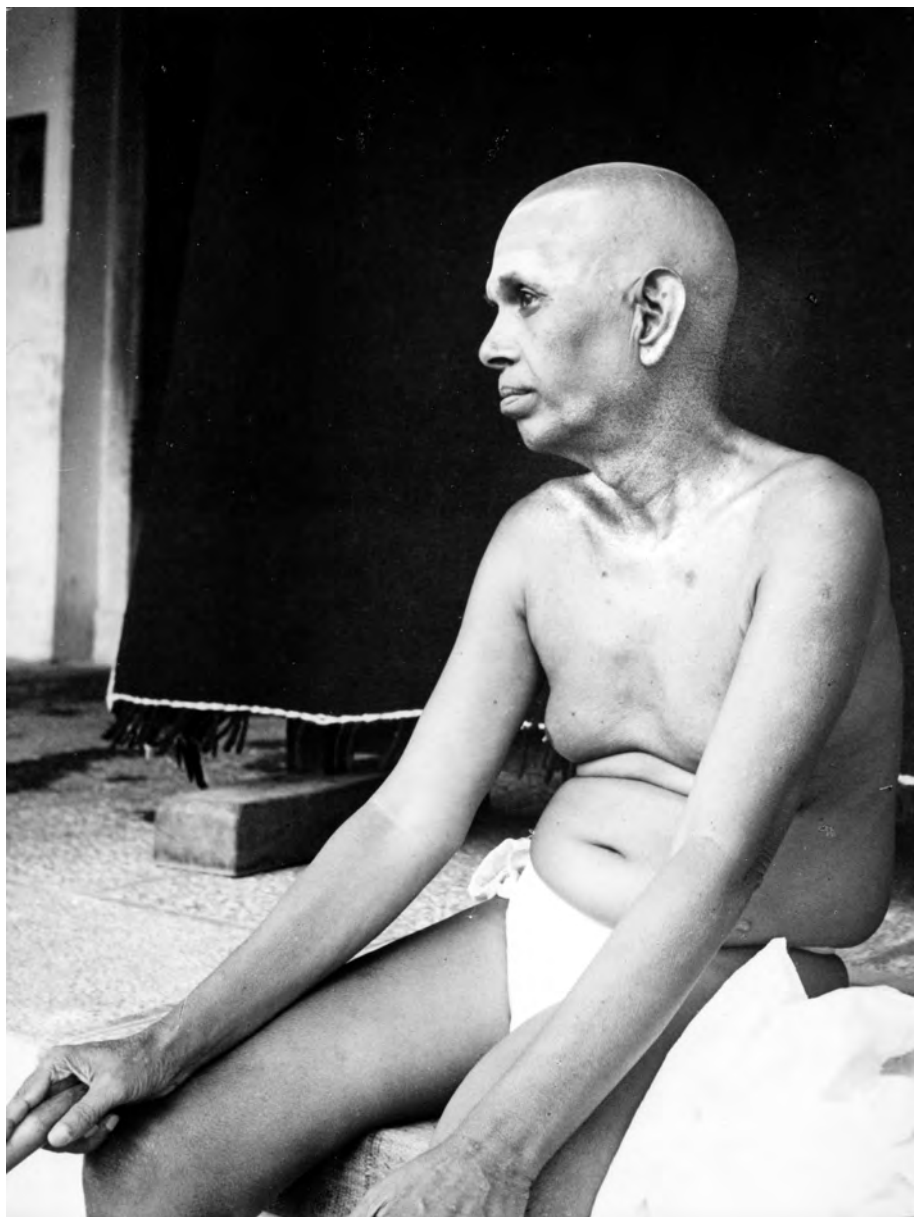
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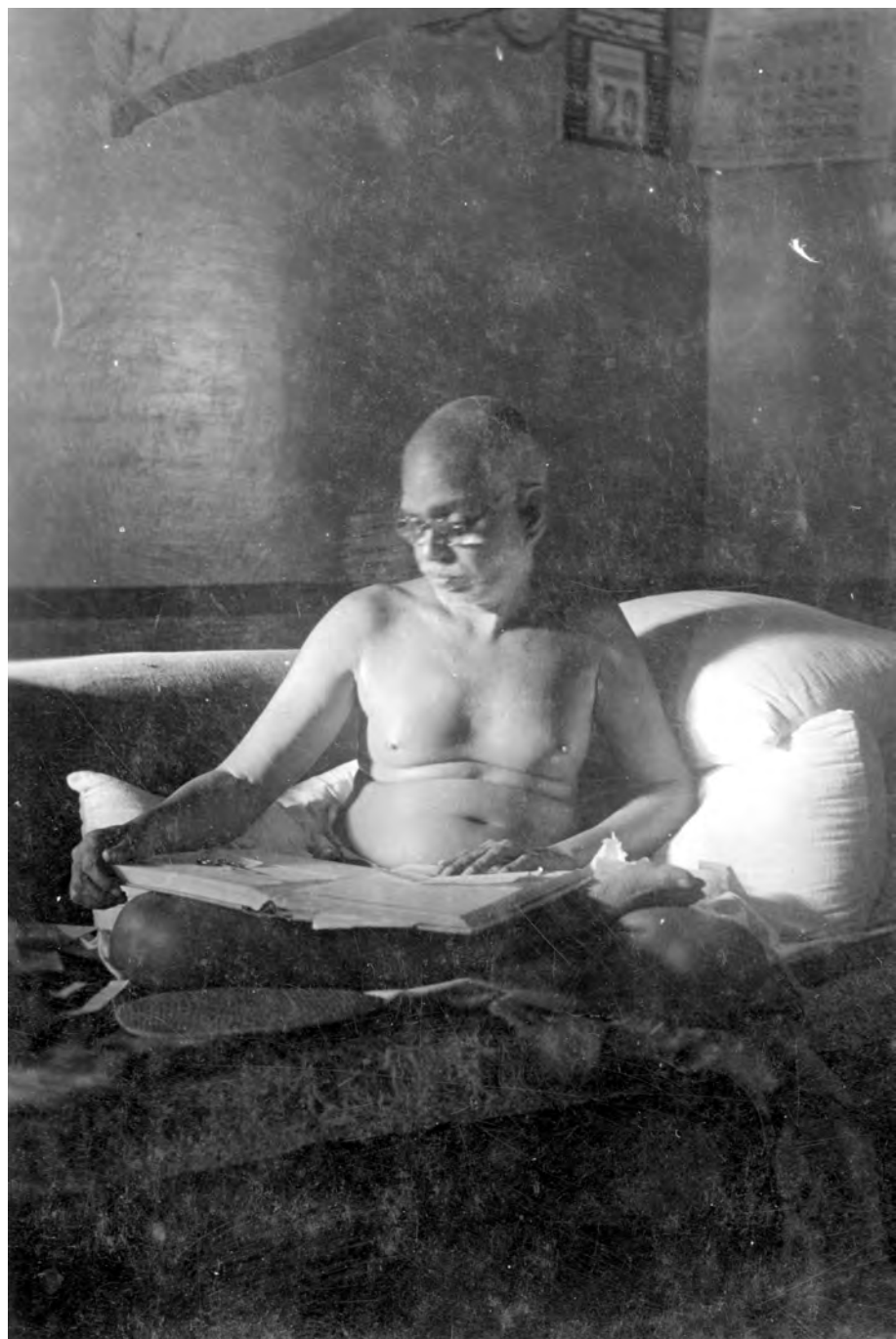
**Om Tat Sat**  
**Sri Ramanarpanamasthu**

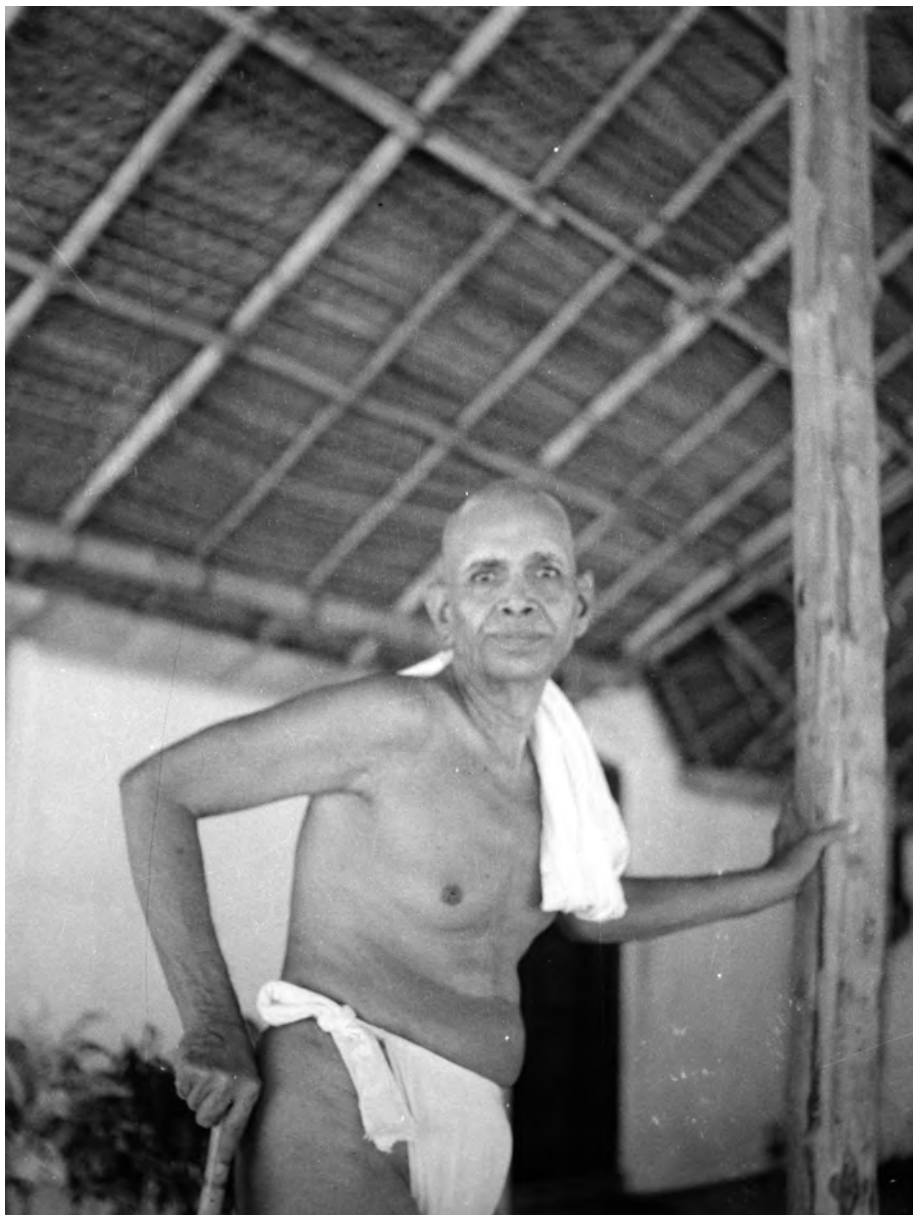


**Bhagavan and Vaikuntavasar**



**Venkata, Sweet as honey and milk,  
You are earth, water, air, fire, ether,  
Sun, moon all beings and myself;  
How and with what words can I praise you?**





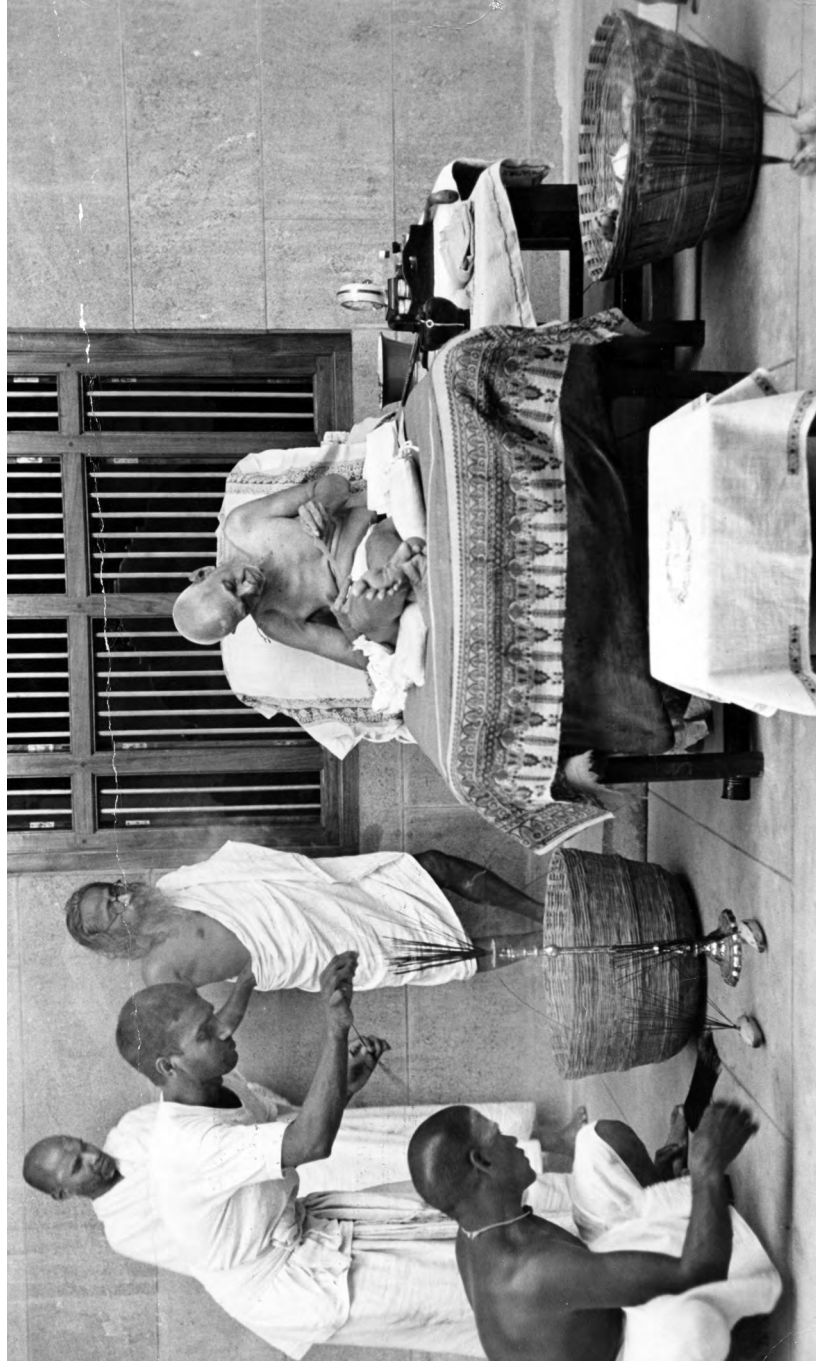
**The freest of men, free from everything, free as the Self**





**Bhagavan walking past the kitchen**





**Bhagavan sitting on the new stone sofa in the New Hall**  
**Sivananda Swami sitting, standing near the window Mouni Srinivasa Rao and Viswanatha Swami**  
**Lighting the incense stick is Venkataratnam**

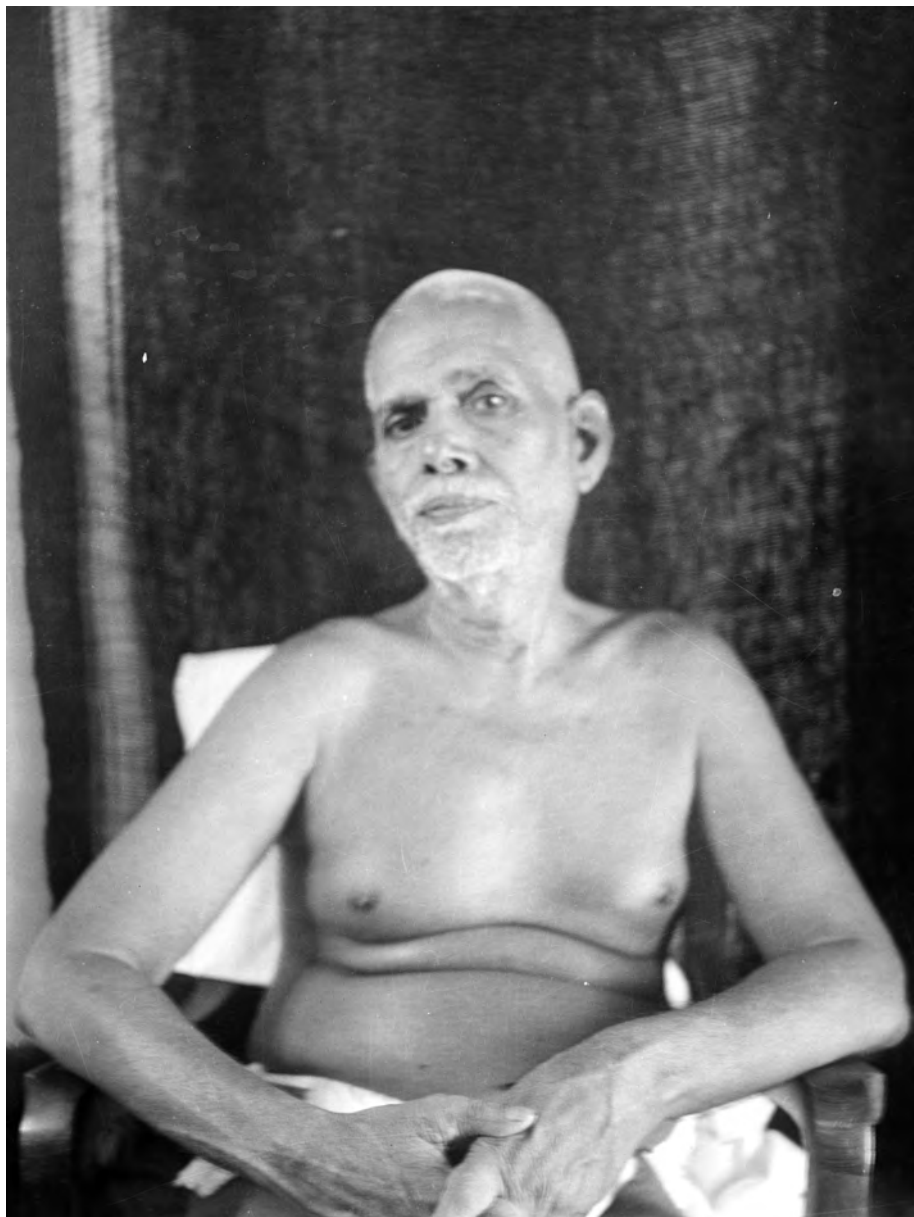




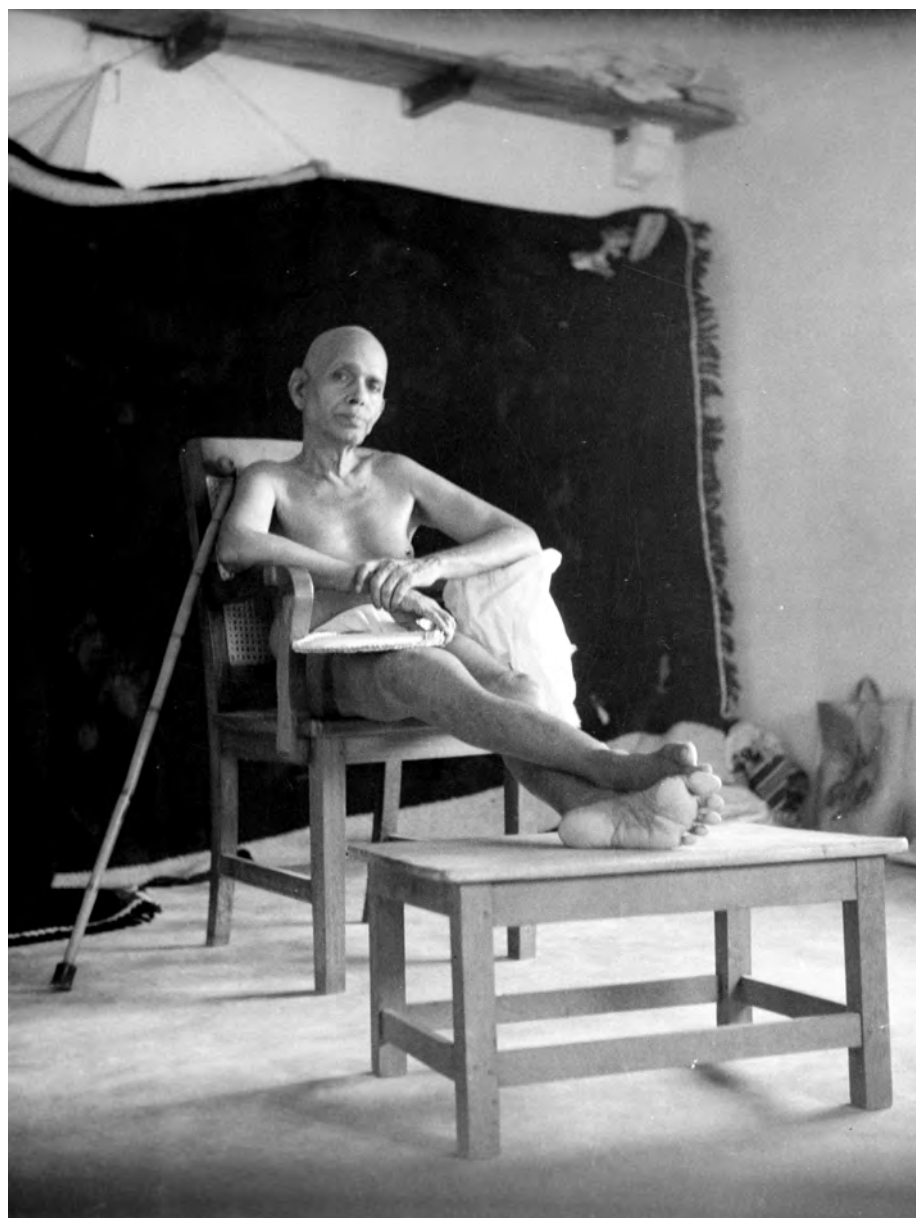
**Bhagavan going for his stroll on the Hill followed by his attendant  
Rangaswami  
(Background Asramam Dispensary)**

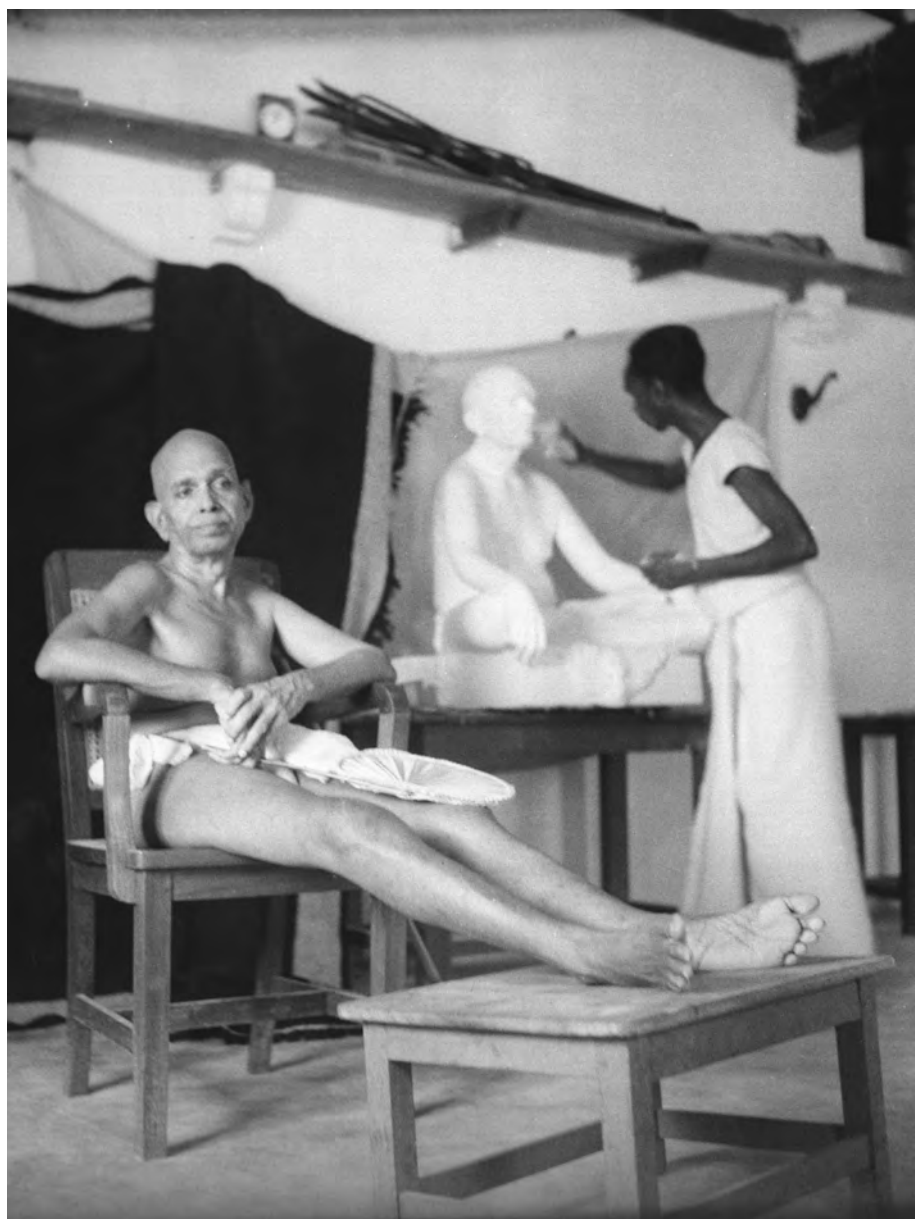


**Bhagavan sitting on the Yogasana in the New Hall**



**Oh Ramana! Who can fathom Thy greatness?**





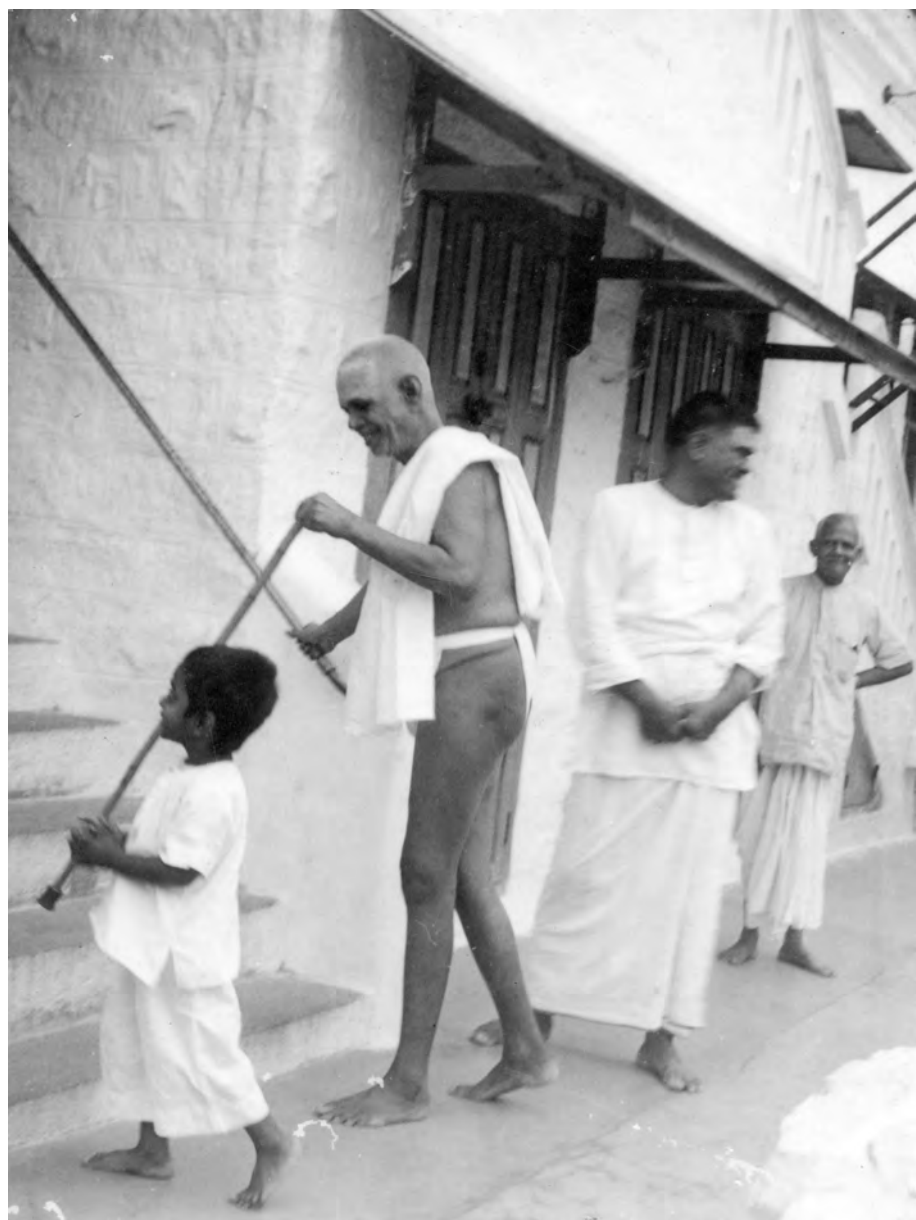
**Sthapati working on Bhagavan's model**







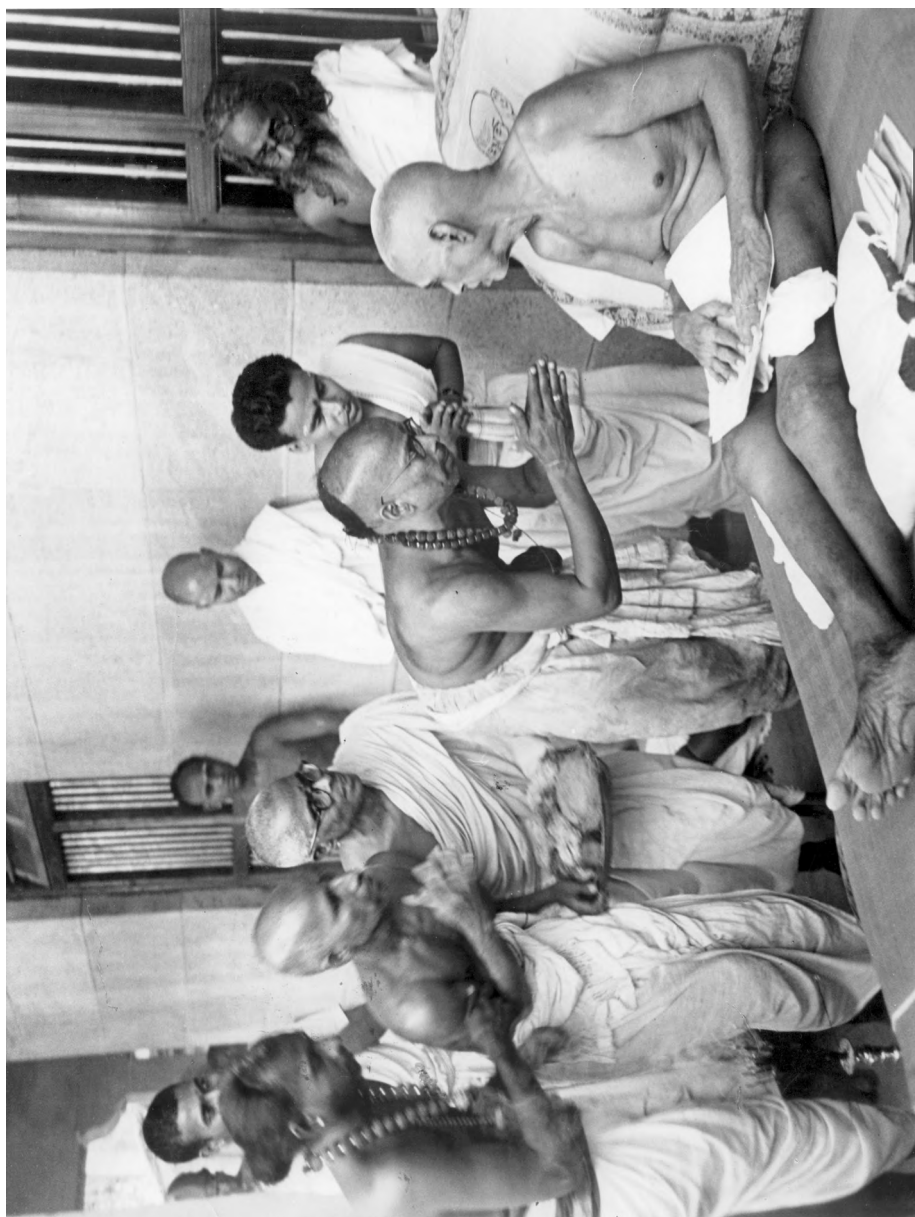
**Bhagavan with Krishnaprem**

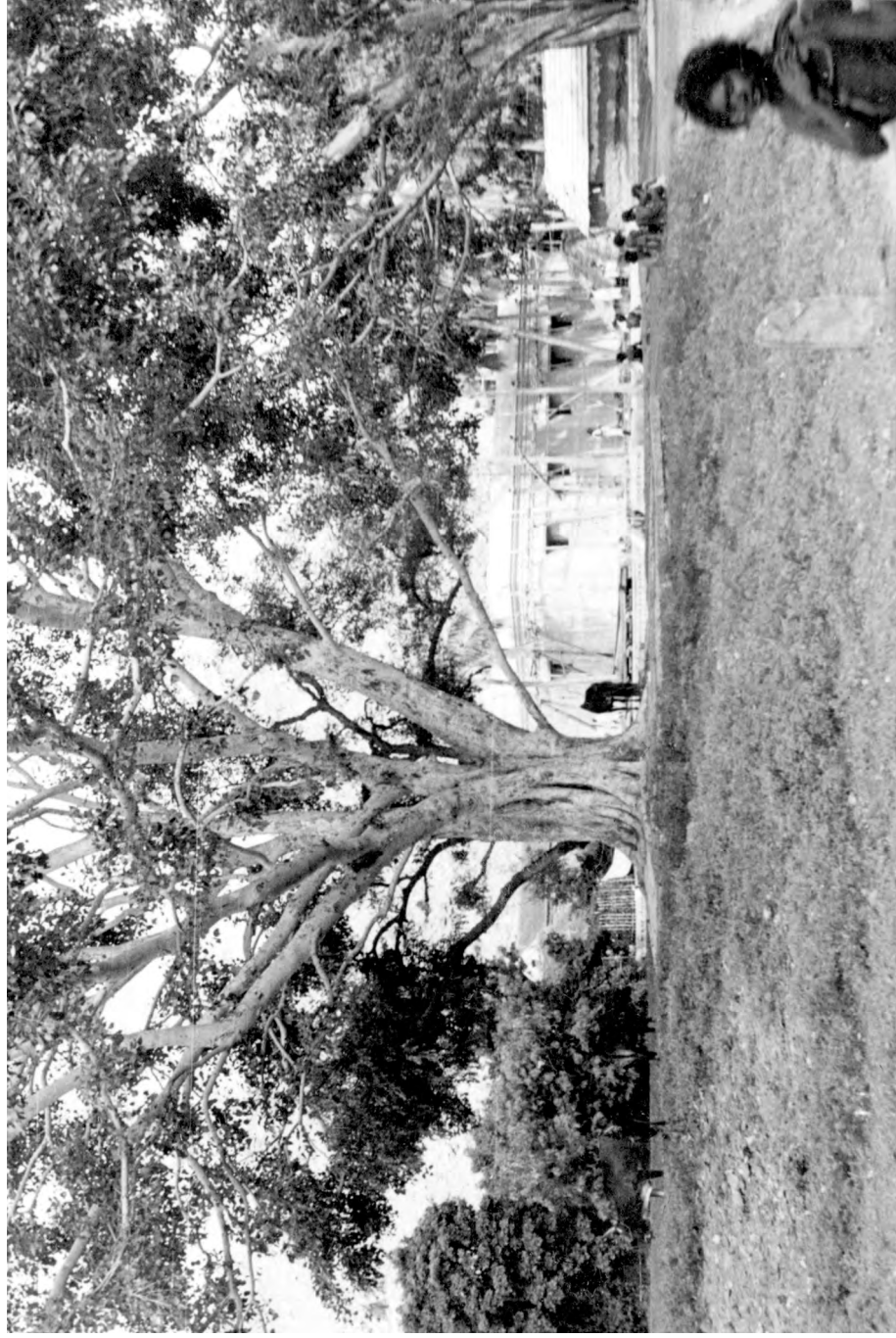






**The faithful worshipping the Master**  
**Standing near the window: Mouni Srinivasa Rao**  
**Sitting close to Bhagavan: Muruganar**





**Construction of Matrubhuteswara Temple**



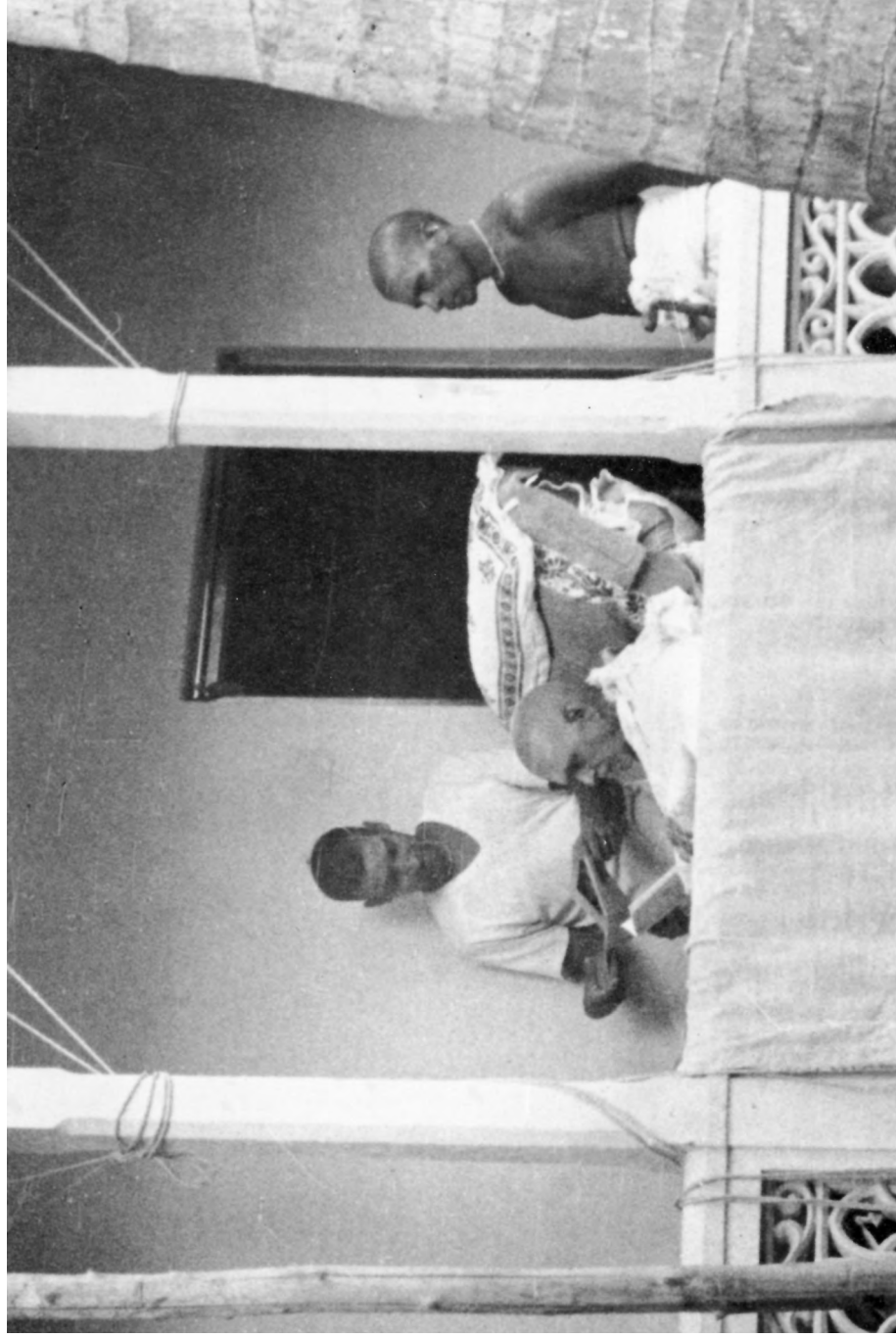


Matrubhuteswara Temple Kumbhabhishekam – Yagasala decorations (March 1949)



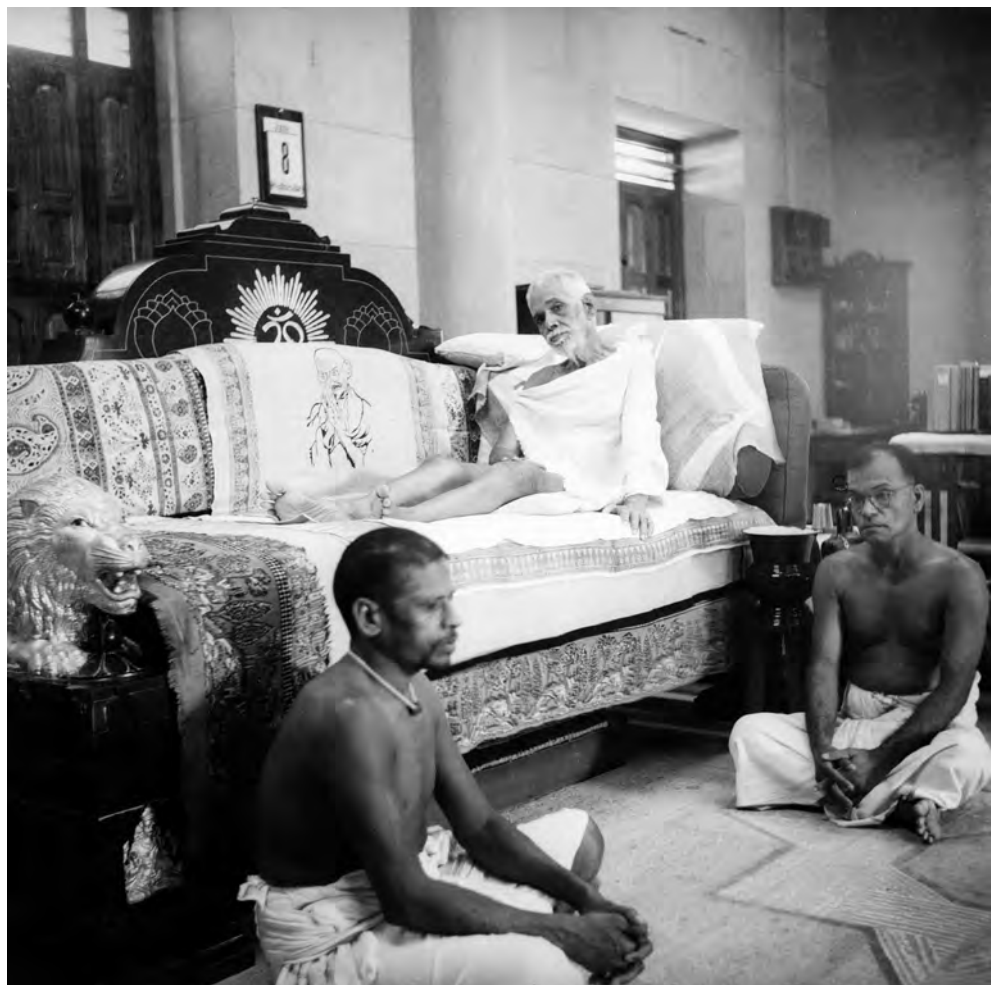
**Sri Ramanasramam entrance (Old Picture)**





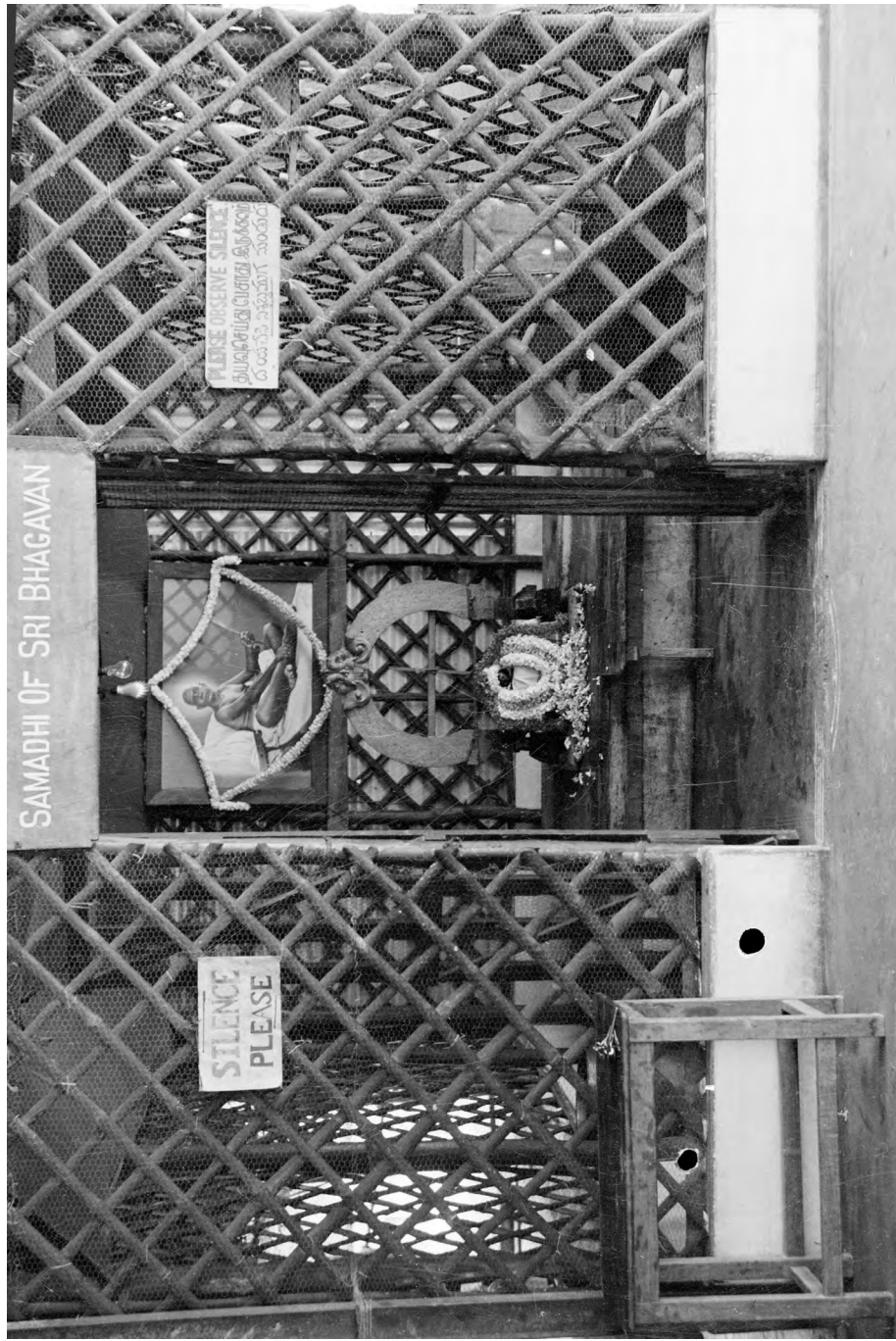
**Bhagavan sitting outside the small room (later Mahanirvana room) with attendant Sivananda Swami**





**Bhagavan in the New Hall after the surgery**

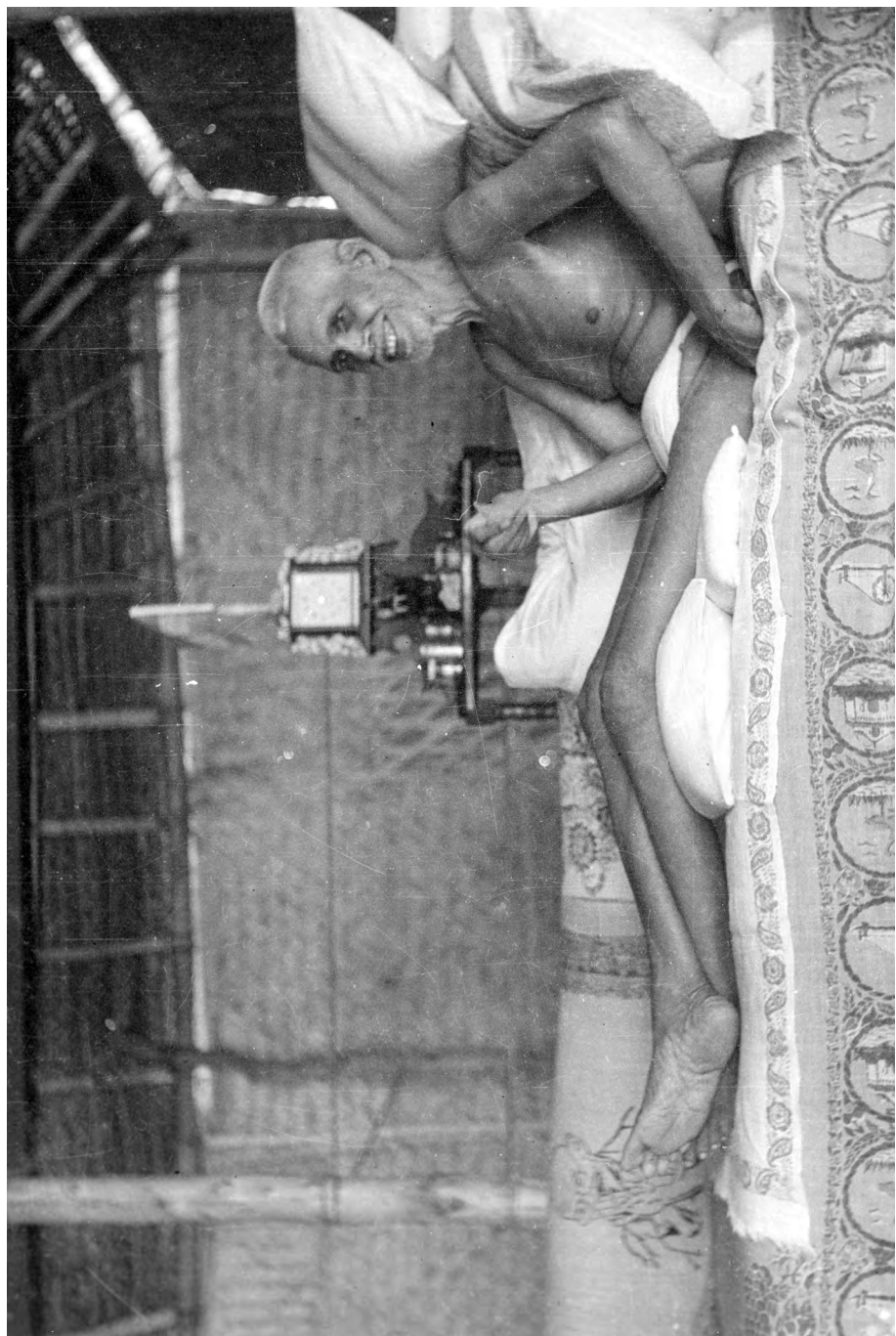




**Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine (Old Picture)**



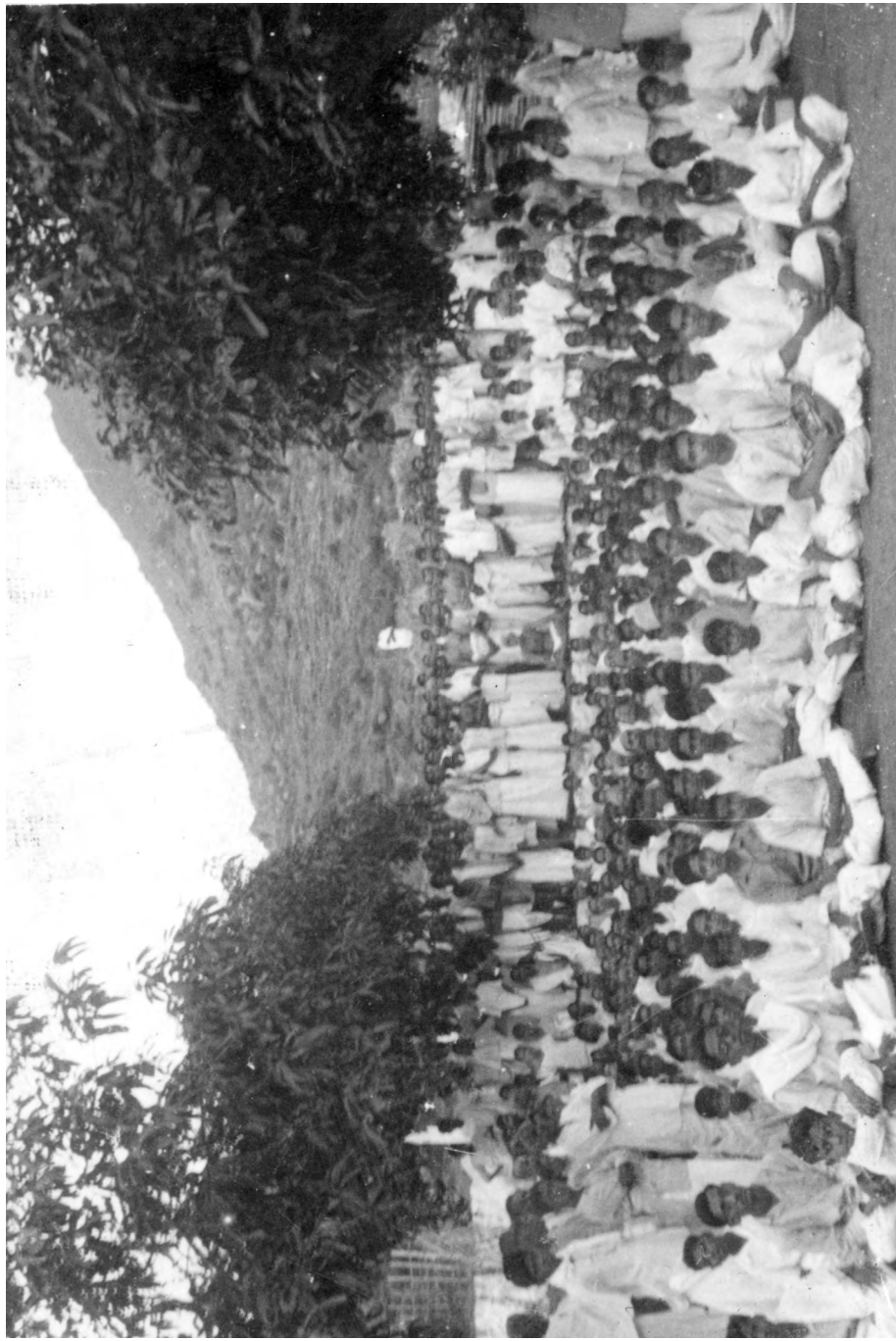




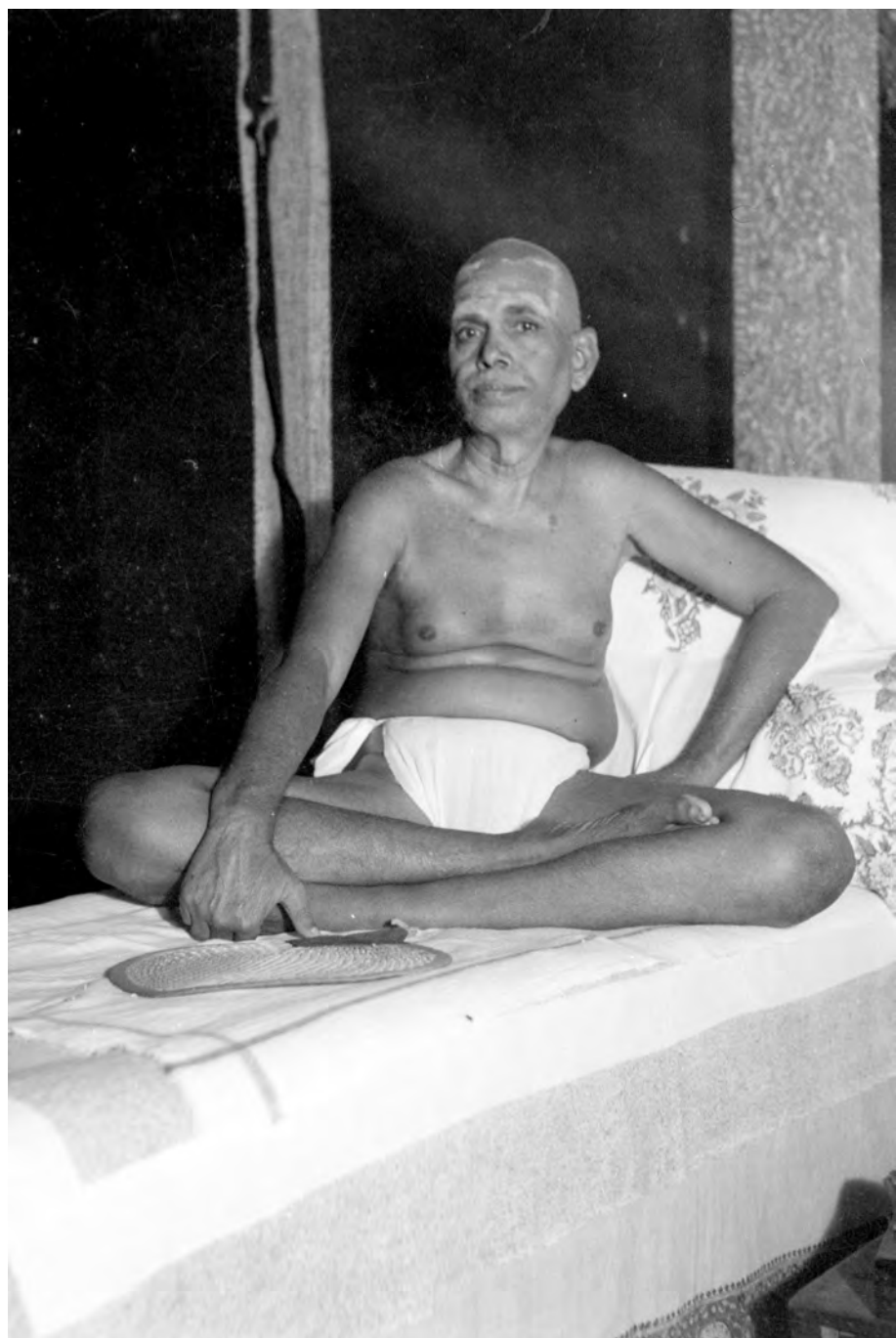




**Bhagavan with the scouts**



**Bhagavan surrounded by His devotees – at the background is Arunachala**





**Ramana, king of Sages who is beyond our comprehension.  
Let us Seek His grace to ever remember Him.**





# ARUNACHALA RAMANA

## ETERNAL OCEAN OF GRACE THE GUIDING PRESENCE BOOK 7

“Where can I go? I am here.” Bhagavan said this repeatedly when people raised concerns about His leaving the body. Bhagavan lives as is evident by the articles written by devotees both before and after His *Mahasamadhi*.

Just after *Mahasamadhi*, S.V. Subramaniam asked Vallimalai Swami, “You promised to show us Sri Bhagavan. Now we see only His body!” Swamiji said, “You fool! Where has He gone? He is here. He has given up His body, but He is in everybody now.”

The experiences of 108 devotees recounted in *The Guiding Presence* make it amply clear that Bhagavan continues to guide us about His teachings, His philosophy and the way for us to get rid of the ignorance and to find the Self.



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